

CHANGES IN ACADEMIC MOTIVATION FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETES
FROM LOW SES BACKGROUNDS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE

DOCTORATE OF EDUCATION

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BALL STATE UNIVERSITY

MUNCIE, IN

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ABSTRACT

DISSERTATION: Changes in academic motivation for high school student-athletes from low SES backgrounds: A phenomenological study

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In this phenomenological study, high school graduates who were identified as low SES and demonstrated a fluctuation of academic success relating to their participation in high school athletics were interviewed to understand their experience of attaining academic achievement while they were playing sports and decline when not playing sports. Participants were six high school graduates from two Eastern Indiana high schools. Interview data were analyzed and three themes were developed relating to the students' academic motivation. The three themes focused on the participants' identities, expectations placed upon them, and the support received during their academic and athletic experiences. Findings from this study may be helpful for those who create programs aimed at motivating students to perform better academically throughout their educational career.

DEDICATION

To my friends and co-workers who have been with me through this journey. I want to thank you for being there to listen to me when I had to work on my paper instead of hanging out with you all.

To my past teachers. Thank you for always pushing me to be better. Teachers often do not get the recognition they deserve, I just want to let you know that you are appreciated.

To my family. Thank you for instilling in me a work ethic that has allowed me to go beyond where I thought I could go. To Ron and Goom. Thank you for always being there for me and for my family.

To my boys, Eli and Avery. I want to tell you how much I appreciate your sacrifice over the last few years. I want you to know that you both mean the world to me and you are my biggest accomplishments. I love you.

Finally, to my wife, my soul mate, and my best buddy #1. Natalie, you have been my biggest support and the person who never let me quit. Your faith in me has been evident from day one and you are the primary reason I was able to get to this point. You inspire me more each day. Now, let's celebrate!

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Educators and researchers have spent decades trying to find ways to motivate students to graduate and perform at the highest academic level possible for those individuals. Some look at reward systems, others focus on punishment, and yet some try to find ways to include students who lack motivation in activities that might increase their academic success. Eccles and Barber (1999), followed by Broh (2002), Burchinal (2008), Dawes and Larson (2011) investigated the benefits of extracurricular activities on academic success. The latest research Hughes, Cao, and Kwok (2016) and Xerri, Radford, and Shacklock (2017) continues to solidify what others found in previous studies (Bohnert, Fredricks & Randall, 2010; Broh, 2002; Dawes & Larson, 2011; Eccles & Barber, 1999; Finn & Rock, 1997; Fredericks & Eccles, 2008). All found that despite race, gender, or socioeconomic status (SES), a majority of the student-athletes who participated in school-sponsored athletics performed better academically. For this study, I define academic success as performing academically at a level that is equivalent to the level needed to successfully complete high school graduation requirements. Certain deviant behaviors have also been linked to athletic participation. Substance abuse, sexual behavior, bullying, and antisocial behavior have been linked to participation, but are sometimes seen, but do not overshadow the positives seen in a majority of the studies (Brechtwald & Prinstein, 2011; Driessens, 2015; Fredericks & Eccles, 2010; Mahoney & Vest, 2012). Another concerning statistic is that nearly one in five American young people do not graduate from high school on time, if ever (DiPaoli, Fox, Ingram, Maushard, Bridgeland, & Balfanz, 2015). This should be unacceptable to all those

who value education. Graduation is the first step to an adult's life and this research may lead to the development of strategies that help students achieve their educational and professional goals.

Additionally, state governments are increasing graduation requirements but doing little to improve the fact that large numbers of students are not graduating with what they need to be successful beyond high school (DiPaoli et al., 2015). Unfortunately, educators are seeing a different type of segregation which increases the gap between social classes and involves students who do not always have the educational foundation needed to be successful in the traditional educational setting (Palardy, 2013; Skrla & Scheurich, 2001). Students who lack the educational foundation are expected to pass graduation exams that some educators feel lack credibility and do not accurately measure a student's ability. In doing so, the educational system has created an environment of distrust and fear among government, educators, and the students who count on these entities to prepare them for their future (Carless, 2009; Giroux, 2016; Hemelt & Marcotte, 2013).

This has been problematic for many students, including minority students and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Often, students from low SES backgrounds enter school with educational learning deficits and struggle from the start of their academic career (Abelev, 2009; Evans & Fuller-Rowell, 2013). Students whose parents and/or grandparents come from low economic means tend to enter their educational careers lacking socioemotional and cognitive skills (Murnane, 2017). These skills include, but are not limited to, task persistence, following instructions, self-management, and relationship skills (Covay & Carbonaro, 2010). The development of these skills is beneficial for the success of all students in the classroom and beyond their time in school. However, minorities and students from low SES backgrounds do not always develop these necessary skills.

Unfortunately, leaders in some educational systems have used the facts about students from low SES backgrounds to place blame instead of finding ways to help all students (Skrla & Scheurich, 2001). Those individuals who are not performing at a level that leaders feel all students should be at during a specific point in their educational career should trigger a focus for improvement instead of being an excuse for poor performance. Students should never have leaders who feel they are limited on what they can do to help minority students and/or students from low economic backgrounds (Skrla & Scheurich, 2001). To meet the needs of those students, legislators are tasked with the responsibility of making educational policy and instigating reform that can promote growth in this diverse group of individuals. Educators who are responsible for instituting this change should invest in processes that increase the students' interactions with positive role models and other influential individuals. These individuals could help motivate at-risk students to accomplish their academic objectives. In order to do this, legislators, administrators, and teachers must make a valuable connection between students and those learning objectives to develop an internal motivation for reaching their educational potential (Bennett, Lutz, & Jayaram, 2012; Condly, 2006; Dawes & Larson, 2011). One such way is to involve more students in school-sponsored extracurricular activities.

Positive role models and educators who strive to get the very best out of all of their students are in schools. According to Zaff, Moore, Papillo, and Williams (2016), students who complete a high school education are expected to be positive participants in many social and economic aspects of everyday life. Many educators enter the profession with high hopes and dreams of making a difference in every child's life because they know that academic achievement is extremely important to the individuals, their families, the schools, and society in general (Rimfeld, Kovas, Dale, & Plomin, 2016). Yet, educators still bear witness to inequalities

in our educational system. It does not take long to realize that there are times when success is very difficult and the odds are stacked against both the educator and the student.

Strong educators work to find ways to decrease the number of students who are unsuccessful in schools and promote opportunities that allow students to be academically successful both in high school and beyond their time in the educational system. When analyzing attributes of unsuccessful students, researchers have found some common characteristics shared among this group. One such area that these individuals had no control over was their socioeconomic status (SES). Researchers have found a positive connection between students from higher SES backgrounds and academic achievement based on vocabulary, noncognitive skill, and socioemotional skills development (Bennett et al., 2012; Chesters & Daly, 2016; Covay & Carbonaro, 2010). Children with an impoverished background tend to have a higher propensity of displaying less motivation and academic ability (Abelev, 2009). Motivation, among other attributes, is an intrapersonal force all students can use to break out of the mold that is set before them early in their educational career.

An area of interest in the present study was to understand if others are experiencing the same benefits from athletic participation that motivated me to achieve the grades needed to get into college and continue on to achieve two graduate level degrees despite not having the financial means to get new athletic gear every year or pay for lunch on a daily basis. Another area of interest was to learn if I can take the findings from my study and provide similar experiences for students who are currently not participating in any extracurricular activities and who lack the motivation needed to be successful in the classroom. With the results, I can share my success with other school leaders and promote growth in students who are both inside and outside of my school district.

Statement of the Problem

Developing an all-encompassing definition of what motivates students is difficult due to the wide variety of personalities, backgrounds, skills, and other factors that affect each individual. The problem is there is a lack of research that has uncovered what factors motivate students who come from low SES backgrounds. Educators are left to decide whether they can help increase student motivation that will allow them to mature personal growth and be academically successful in school.

Educators are tasked with deciding what it is that drives students to try harder in the classroom. Some have started to make the connection with athletics and noticed an increase in students' motivation in the classroom during those times when students are involved in school-sponsored athletics. However, with this connection, they are left wondering if it is the structure of the sport, the relationship with teammates, the academic requirements of the school, or the interaction with positive role models that is the main benefit for the student-athlete (Abruzzo et al., 2016; Bakoban et al., 2015; Dawes & Larson, 2011). Researchers have also focused on how athletic participation relates to the frequency of participation, financial resources, school quality, and parental interaction (Condly, 2006; Denault & Poulin, 2009; Driessens, 2015; Fredericks & Simpkins, 2012; Myers & Perez, 2004). In searching for the answers, results may differ between different types of student-athletes. Additionally, educators are given the challenge of making connections with the students who struggle. They strive to ignite a desire in these students to not only want to be successful, but also find ways to help them transition the desire into action. Putting forth the effort needed to accomplish their educational goals will lead to development of personal skills that can be used well beyond their high school years.

However, there are times that students perform at an academic level that is beyond what is expected (Bui & Rush, 2016). Often times, students from low SES backgrounds start school without the vital skills needed to be academically successful and lack the motivational drive needed to reach an expected level of performance early in their educational careers (Bennett et al., 2012; Condly, 2006; Im, Hughes, Cao, & Kwok, 2016; Peck, Roeser, & Zarrett, 2008; Rist, 1970). The job of all educators is to try to foster the growth of motivation needed for academic success and goal attainment in those students in which these attributes are lacking. An area that shows promise for the promotion of academic success is participation in athletics (Abruzzo, Lenis, Romero, Maser, & Morote, 2016; Im et al., 2016; Schwartz, Capella, & Seidman, 2015).

Personal bias can be a detriment to any phenomenological study. Striving to ensure students have someone in their lives who tells them they are special and can accomplish whatever they put in their heart and minds is a goal that pushed me as an educational leader. It was very important to relate the findings to the participants' experiences and place hope that at the conclusion of the study the results can further other people's understanding of what inspires other students with similar situations to have successful and productive lives. My past experiences should not be eliminated because they add value to the meaning developed from the process of the study (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2010).

Purpose of the Study

Many individuals from low SES backgrounds enter high school performing at or below grade level. Some remain at that level for the four years of high school, while others shift gears and find ways to be successful in the classroom. Researchers have identified these patterns, along with patterns on the benefits of participation in extracurricular athletics (Bakoban & Aljarallah, 2015; Broh, 2002; Eccles, Stone, & Hunt, 2003; Hughes et al., 2016). My research

focused on understanding which factors of athletic participation the student-athletes felt best motivated them to be academically successful during the time they participated in a sport. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the experiences student-athletes from low SES backgrounds had while playing school-sponsored athletics in order to understand how those experiences were related to increased academic motivation to be successful in the classroom while participating in sports and ended at the conclusion of the season.

Past research has demonstrated that many individuals develop attributes that promote academic success through participation in athletics (Abruzzo et al., 2016; Fredericks & Eccles, 2010; Morris, 2016). Finding how students relate the experiences they had while participating in athletics to their academic success may lead to some guidance on ways to motivate students throughout the school year and not only during the athletic season. An understanding of what motivates students to work harder during certain times of the year will help educators define the qualities needed in programs designed to increase the academic motivation of individuals throughout the whole school year whether they participate in athletics or not. With these qualities, programs could be used to inspire in students the development of the motivational processes needed to form a foundation of educational success that can be built on as they grow into lifelong learners.

The research participants were past student-athletes from Casperson High School and Martin High School (pseudonyms) who had either graduated or left the school in either 2017 or 2018 and demonstrated higher academic achievement while participating in athletics only to drop in performance throughout the off-season. These students demonstrated the overall effort needed to be successful during parts of their high school career but demonstrated a lack of motivation when they were not participating in a sport. In this phenomenological study, an inquiry into the

experiences the student-athletes associated with their motivation and academic success, as well as why those experiences did not continue beyond the athletic season, led to discovery of key components of understanding the student experience as a whole.

Theoretical Framework

To understand how the experience of athletic participation relates to academic success during the athletic season in some student-athletes from low SES backgrounds, I analyzed my findings using Self-Determination Theory (SDT). SDT explains how an individual's social environment affects their personal development in areas such as motivation, self-regulation, behavior, and many other aspects of an individual's personal growth (Deci & Ryan, 2008). SDT also seeks to determine the autonomous and/or controlled factors related to the student-athlete's motivation and distinguish which improves development in the way an individual learns from their experiences in life (Bartholomew et al., 2011). A guiding principle of my study was to explore the experiences that students from low SES backgrounds have while playing athletics and to relate those findings to changes in motivation for success in academic classes.

Understanding why certain students from low SES backgrounds choose to be motivated to perform at a higher level in their academic classes only when they are participating in sports or working to make the grades prior to the start of the season is the phenomenological component of the study. SDT focuses on both the autonomous motivation and the controlled motivation that affect a student's desire to be successful either in the educational setting or outside of the classroom (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Determining the type of motivation used by the student-athlete to develop as an individual, I used Deci and Ryan's definitions to create meanings that relate to my study. I defined autonomous motivation as the way an individual looks at themselves. Does the athletic participation give the individual a sense of self-worth and

gratification when they receive individual accolades such as player of the week, all-conference, or all-state selection? Additionally, I defined controlled motivation as those external motivators where punishment like additional conditioning, denial of awards, disqualification from participation, and/or team success motivates the individual (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Although the type of motivation that inspires the individual to grow is important, my study focused on what student-athletes perceived as the motivating factors that pushed them to be successful during the time they participated in sports, but no longer motivated them to reach the same level of academic success when they no longer were involved in athletics.

Research Questions

The following three questions were used to focus the study:

1. What meaning, if any, did student-athletes from low SES backgrounds ascribe to the experience of athletic participation as it related to their academic motivation?
2. What role did athletic participation play in increasing the student-athletes academic motivation?
3. What experiences changed at the conclusion of the athletic season that resulted in student-athletes performing at a lower level academically?

Significance of the Study

When discussing the benefits associated with athletic participation, some researchers fail to identify the perceptions of individual athletes and whether they felt the experience itself increased motivation and led to academic success (Abruzzo, 2016; Broh, 2002). Determining what aspects of athletic participation lead to additional motivation for students was imperative to gaining a better understanding of how the experience of playing a sport increased the student-

athlete's effort in the classroom. In this study, I investigated whether student-athletes perceived that their academic success was attributed to internal or external factors, a combination of multiple factors, or the possibility that nothing about athletic participation was attributed by the athlete as a motivating factor in promoting academic success.

Discovering what the student-athletes from low socioeconomic backgrounds perceived as influencing their effort to be academically successful was imperative to truly understanding these individuals and others who share their challenge. If these interpretations varied, they were not held at a different level or importance; instead, they added a new plausible explanation as to why individuals may respond differently to a phenomenon (Bradbury-Jones, Irvine, & Sambrook, 2010).

The difficulty with many quantitative studies about student-athletes is that they do not provide rich descriptions of the individual experiences and perspectives that may provide greater detail into factors contributing to academic success, or lack thereof, during the entire school year (Bohnert et al., 2010; Broh, 2002; Eccles & Roesner, 2004). It was critical to probe deeper into the experiences of the student-athletes and determine what motivating factors contributed to their drive to be academically successful during the season. This type of information may provide educators with strategies to foster academic success for students who struggle to be motivated throughout their educational careers.

Exploring the experiences of high school students who participated in school-sponsored athletics to determine what aspects, if any, of athletic participation helped develop the motivation needed to be academically successful was a goal of this study; this exploration involved three main steps. First, it was beneficial to determine any factors associated with athletic participation that helped increase student motivation for academic success. Second, I determined what

external influences were perceived by the student-athletes to have motivated them to be successful in the classroom during the athletic season. Finally, I analyzed the extent to which student-athletes attributed the experience of participating in sports to developing the motivation needed to be successful both in and outside of the classroom. The core of understanding the link between athletic participation and academic success involved exploring meaning in the phenomenon whereby student-athletes demonstrated motivation to do their best while playing sports only to perform at a lower level when athletics eligibility was not on the line. The study is significant because the results may give information on ways to provide opportunities to motivate all students throughout the school year. This would include the athletes as well as students who chose different avenues of becoming a part of the school community. The results could lead to higher educational success rates and more opportunities for students upon completion of their high school requirements.

It is important to identify ways that students can experience the opportunities to increase motivation in as many situations as possible throughout their academic careers. Sharing the information gained in this study with fellow administrators may assist them in incorporating these positive aspects of participation in an attempt to develop student motivation and resolve at the early stages of the student-athlete's educational career. In doing so, students will have a clearer path toward educational success and a foundation upon which to build their future plans.

Delimitations

Participants were limited to student-athletes who were from families with low SES backgrounds. This was determined by their acceptance in the free and reduced lunch program and included athletics as an activity that students could participate in at no cost to them or their family. These students must also have shown academic success while participating in athletics

while demonstrating decreased success when not in sports. Student achievement was measured by analyzing academic performance throughout the students' careers. Academic records helped determine which students were successful during times that grades were used to determine eligibility but whose grades fell below similar performance levels when grades did not matter to their success in athletics. The number of participants was limited to a maximum of eight students who met the criteria for inclusion in the study; thus more relevant, in-depth information was obtained that led to a better understanding of how the students' experiences related to their academic success. Students from low SES backgrounds were chosen because, despite their lack of financial resources, these individuals still participated in school-sponsored athletics. Due to the qualitative nature of the study and the phenomenon being experienced by the participants, the research cannot be generalized, but can lead to new perspectives created by those who read it (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Definitions

For the purpose of my study, I have defined the following terms:

Autonomous motivation: Autonomous motivation comprises both intrinsic motivation and the types of extrinsic motivation in which people have identified with an activity's value and ideally will have integrated it into their sense of self (Deci & Ryan, 2008).

Controlled motivation: Controlled motivation consists of both external regulation, in which one's behavior is a function of external contingencies of reward or punishment, and introjected regulation, in which the regulation of action has been partially internalized and is energized by factors such as approval, avoidance of shame, contingent self-esteem, and ego-involvements (Deci & Ryan, 2008).

Extracurricular Activities (ECA): Extracurricular activities refer to any organized activity which students can participate in beyond the typical school day and school curriculum (Abruzzo et al., 2016).

Hermeneutics: Hermeneutics focuses on consciousness and experience, which are essential in ethnographic, participant-observation, and grounded theory research (Moustakas, 1994).

Indiana Department of Education (IDOE): The IDOE is an institution that guides Indiana public and private educational institutions in policy, standards implementation, curriculum planning and educational law.

Indiana High School Athletic Association (IHSAA): The IHSAA is the governing body over high school that assists in policy, rules, laws, and implementation of the rules for all Indiana public and private schools.

Phenomenology: Phenomenology refers to knowledge as it appears to one's consciousness, including the ability to describe what one perceives, senses, and knows in one's immediate awareness and experience (Moustakas, 1994).

Self-Determination Theory (SDT): SDT is a theory of human motivation and personality that focuses on the social-environmental conditions that enhance versus diminish self-motivation and healthy psychological adjustment (Flood, 2010).

Socioeconomic Status (SES): SES refers to an individual's or group's position within a hierarchical social structure. Socioeconomic status depends on a combination of variables including: occupation, education, income, wealth, and place of residence. Sociologists often use SES as a means of predicting behavior.

Summary and Organization of the Study

The purpose of the first chapter was to define the research problem and explain the rationale for choosing to conduct this study, while also explaining its significance to the field of education. There is a need to understand how students from a low SES background perceive their experiences of participation in high school athletics as motivation to perform at a higher level in the classroom and reach a level of academic success they feel they would not have reached if they had not participated in a sport.

The next chapter is a literature review detailing how athletic participation affects students in the development of pro-social, psychological, and academic skills needed to be academically successful. The review of literature examines various attributes of athletic participation and how they influence, both positively and negatively, the development of student-athletes. Chapter three focuses on the methods used to conduct the study, along with the methods of data collection, coding, and analysis. The theoretical lens organizes the study and is the frame through which I will analyze my data. Chapter four will be used to present my findings from the interview process involving all six participants. The final chapter will discuss the implications of my findings, answer the research questions, and provide recommendations to other school leaders. It will conclude with recommendations for possible further research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

For centuries, educators have sought to understand various qualities each of their students possess. With each new combination, educators try new techniques and instructional methods in an attempt to promote success for students in their classrooms. One area that seems to be an issue with students is a lack of motivation to always do their best to be academically successful. Students come to school with a variety of educational abilities and attitudes towards learning. Educators work to develop ways to reach each and every student and push them to reach their fullest potential. One opportunity that has been associated with developing positive motivational characteristics in students is participation in school-sponsored athletics.

Included in this literature review are previous research findings on the benefits and barriers related to student academic success as it relates to athletic participation. The literature included helps define academic motivation and extracurricular activities that promote academic success, as well as provides additional information that connects the two to demonstrate the positive and negative attributes associated with student-athletes. The research formed the basis for my exploration of the educational drive of students identified as low SES who demonstrated educational success while participating in athletics only to falter when the season concluded.

Many researchers view extracurricular activities in different ways. Some examples of extracurricular activities include, but are not limited to, sports, performing arts, academic teams, clubs, community groups, and activities associated with church (Denault & Poulin, 2008; Fredericks & Eccles, 2010; Fredericks & Simpkins, 2013). For the purpose of my review, I limited my discussion of extracurricular activities to include only athletics, a subset of extracurricular activities. The primary focus of the discussion was on student-athletes as I

examined who participated in athletics, whether or not participation was equal, what benefits resulted from participation, and whether or not participants became involved in activities that were less than desirable because they participated in athletics (Barnett, 2007; Brechwald & Prinstein, 2011; Covay & Carbonaro, 2010; Dawes et al., 2015).

Method of Literature Review

To start the process of conducting a review involving athletic participation, I accessed various databases and searched for scholarly literature on the effect of extracurricular activities on youth and young adults. The majority of the articles were found using EbscoHOST, psychARTICLES, and psychINFO. In searching for the articles to use, I entered keywords or phrases such as: *extracurricular and academic achievement, academic motivation, athletics, sports, resiliency, grit, ECA, school-sponsored activities, after-school activities, and self-determination theory.*

I found common themes that were supported by numerous researchers. In Table 1, I summarized a number of quantitative studies and determined which variables the researchers used and the sample size; I then determined whether or not the researchers linked motivation and academic success to participation in extracurricular athletics. These themes often analyzed not only the academic benefits of athletic participation, but also the social and psychological benefits of participation. Researchers often studied high school students due to the fact that they typically start to develop deeper relationships with teammates and coaches and could relate those relationships to academic success (Broh, 2002; Dawes & Larson, 2011; Eccles et al., 2003).

Many of the researchers related educational success to the positive attributes of athletic participation. Table 1 is a summary of widely cited researchers and contains the information most relevant to my study. As seen in Table 1, students benefit from athletic participation in

many ways. Student-athletes develop prosocial skills and learn to interact with other students and positive role models to develop the support needed to be socially and academically successful (Broh, 2002; Fredericks & Eccles, 2008; Im et al., 2016). This allowed them to contribute to the community and establish networks that remained helpful beyond their time in school. Additionally, the students benefitted psychologically by gaining self-worth and a sense of being a part of a unit or team (Abruzzo et al., 2016; Dawes & Larson, 2011; Peck et al., 2008). Academically, researchers noted that student-athletes tended to perform higher on standardized tests and also achieved higher grade point averages (Broh, 2002; Eccles et al., 2003; Fredericks & Eccles, 2008).

TABLE 1*Key characteristics, measures and results of various quantitative studies.*

Study	Sample	Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	Other Variables Accounted for	Relevance to Athletics
Academic					
Abruzzo et al. 2016	2 high schools, 234 11 th graders Mixed Method	Academic Self-concept and GPA	Academic ECA and athletic ECA participation	Range of ECAs and organization of ECA	Athletic participation correlates with higher self-concept, grades and motivation.
Bakoban & Aljarallah 2015	College 239 students Mixed-Method	GPA	All ECA types, academic, athletic, community based	Study hours, ECA participation hours per month/ semester	Significant positive differences in the GPA of students in athletics.
Broh 2002	NELS:88 12,578 Individuals	Academic Achievement	Scholl -based ECA types, sports, drama and music	SES, Race Gender, School size and type, Parental income and schooling	Small but significant increase in academic performance. Improved social capital.
Covay & Carbonaro 2010	Elementary (3 rd) Students ECLS-K 21,260	Noncognitive skill development in elementary students	Different types of ECA participation, music lessons, dance lessons, performing arts, sports and clubs	SES	Athletics help students develop their non-cognitive skills needed for classroom work.
Fredericks & Eccles 2008	1,047 8 th grades students	Grades, prosocial development	Participation in ECA (In school clubs, sports	SES, race, and gender	Participation in organized sports results in higher

			and out of school recreational activities)		grades, better self-esteem, and lower participation in at-risk behavior.
Im et al. 2016	483 7,8 and 9 grade students	Academic motivation and achievement	Participation in sports and performance arts/clubs	Gender and race	Participation in athletics results in positive school identity, grades and behavior continued from middle school through grade 9.
Marsh & Kleitman 2002	NELS:88 12,084 reduced to 4,250 with reliable data for this study	School grades, self- esteem, occupational aspirations and college enrollment	Participation in ECAs (Sports, students government, school publications and performing arts	Various background variables were controlled (SES)	Athletics benefit students in academics by fostering school identification and commitment.
McNeal Jr. 1995	1980 HSB 14,249 students from 735 schools	Drop-out rate	Participation in ECAs (Athletics, fine arts, academic, and vocational	Race, SES, gender, and “pullout forces” such as employment.	Participation in athletics and fine arts significantly reduces the dropout rate.

TABLE 1 (*Continued*)*Key characteristics, measures and results of various studies.*

Study	Sample	Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	Other Variables	Relevance to athletics
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					Accounted for
Prosocial					
Eccles et al. 2003	MSALT 1800 6 th graders to 25- 26	ECA Participation and academic performance	ECA types (16 sports and 30 school and community activities)	SES, gender, and intellectual aptitude	Athletic participants achieve higher in academics, but various activities do cause negative results such as drinking and drug use.
Eccles & Barber 1999	MSALT 1,259 respondents who completes all 6 stages of data collection	Educational trajectories and outcomes	Participation in ECA types (Church, team sports, performing arts, and academic clubs.	Gender, completion of survey	Different activities had different level of participation by gender. Students do better academically and are less likely to engage in alcohol and drug use.
Fredericks & Eccles 2005	498 participants grades 9-12	Positive and negative youth development	ECA participation	Race and SES, gender	Involvement in structured activities results in positive academic engagement and improved psychological development

TABLE 1 (*Continued*)*Key characteristics, measures and results of various studies.*

Study	Sample	Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	Other Variables Accounted for	Relevance to Athletics
Psychological					
Abruzzo et al. 2016	2 high schools, 234 11 th graders	Academic self-concept and GPA	Academic ECA and athletic ECA participation	Range of ECAs and organization of ECA	Athletic participation correlates with higher self-concept, grades, and motivation.
Dawes & Larson 2011	100 students Students were various grades and in various organized programs	Motivational development in school.	Participation in in-school ECA and programs outside of school.	SES, age, gender, ethnicity and years of participation	38/44 felt involvement in ECA improved motivation and added significance to personal values, ambitions and personal identity.
Finn & Rock 1997	NELS :88 1, 803 minority students from low SES homes	Educational resilience	ECA participation	Background and social characteristics, race	Participation in athletics did not affect resiliency and academic performance.
Fischer & Theis 2014	4, 270 students in grades 5, 7 and 9	School attachment and learning goals	ECA participation and learning goal attainment	School level, students level and time spent on participation	Results are directly correlated with the quality of school and whether the students

					receive social support.
Fredericks & Eccles 2010	MADICS 1, 480 7 th graders for wave 1.	Adolescent adjustment	Breadth of ECA participation. Quantity of ECA participation.	Gender, Race, SES	There was a significant correlation between good grades, educational expectations and status and higher ECA participation including athletics.
Mahoney & Vest 2012	1,115 youth aged 12-18	Adolescent adjustment	Intensity of ECA participation	Adjustments made prior to final results and factors affecting individuals prior to study	Organized athletic participation is significantly related to all indicators of positive adjustment in young adulthood while no relationship with problematic adjustment.
Peck et al. 2008	MADICS 1,356 14 year old students	Educational resilience	Quantity and quality of ECA	Gender, race. SES, parental education	Involvement of “vulnerable youth” in athletics promotes educational persistence and healthy development.

Athletic Participation

As students absorb knowledge from those around them, they learn new methods of problem solving and develop ways to increase their internal motivation needed to succeed both on the field and in the classroom. While students grow, both physically and in maturity, schools must work to provide them with opportunities that will allow them to stay motivated and engaged throughout their educational careers (Bakoban et al., 2015). This type of motivation can be driven through involvement in structured extracurricular athletics and interaction with teammates, coaches, and family members (Bennett et al., 2012; Broh, 2002; Burchinal, 2008).

Over the past three decades, researchers have developed multiple theories and hypotheses about the effect that sports have on the youth in our schools. Some focused on the concern that spending time in various sports could negatively impact academic performance (Fredricks, 2012; Mahoney & Vest, 2012), while others stayed neutral stating there is little association between them (Broh, 2002; Marsh & Kleitman, 2002). In time, the focus started to turn toward the multiple benefits of athletics and the various positive attributes associated with participation in the various types of sports (Abruzzo et al., 2016; Fredericks & Eccles 2010; Mahoney & Vest, 2012; Marsh et al., 2016; McNeal, 1995; Williams & Bryan, 2012).

When looking at athletic participation, researchers often chose a wider variety of activities to examine. Extracurricular activities, for the purpose of my study, were limited to any sport that took place outside of the typical school day and was structured and sponsored by the school (Abruzzo et al., 2016). Other researchers did not limit the scope of their investigations to athletes and focused on any activity that involved students outside of the typical school day

(Dawes & Larson, 2011; Fischer & Theis, 2014; Larson & Angus, 2011; Mahoney & Vest, 2012).

Among the studies examined, four variables were commonly held constant when analyzing their effect on student success. Race, age, socioeconomic status (SES), and gender were explored in a majority of the research studies, whereas family education and parental make-up were discussed in a couple of the studies (Brown, 2013; Driessens, 2015; Posner & Vandell, 1999). Once those factors were controlled for, the researchers varied greatly on what data they collected. Grade point average (GPA) (Abruzzo et al., 2016; Bakoban & Aljarallah, 2015; Eccles & Barber, 1999; Morris, 2016), social capital (Covay & Carbonaro, 2010; Dawes & Larson, 2011; Larson & Angus, 2011; Schaefer et al., 2011), psychological benefits (Bakoban & Aljarallah, 2015; Dawes & Larson, 2011; Finn & Rock, 1997; Marsh et al., 2016), and improved parental involvement (Covay & Carbonaro, 2010; Marsh et al., 2016; Williams, Greenleaf, Albert, & Barnes, 2014) were all benefits observed when analyzing the data related to participation in structured extracurricular activities, including sports. According to these studies, the more the students were actively engaged in quality, structured ECAs, the better they performed academically and socially.

It is important to note that studies showed that athletics can promote educational success during the transitional stages of a student's educational career. Students in the upper elementary grades and middle school years are more prone to develop the skills they need to improve academically by participating in structured athletics (Im et al., 2016). This personal development prepares students for the challenging times in life when they need to dig deep within themselves to find a solution that leads to success.

While the benefits seemed to be varied and plentiful, many of the researchers attempted to find areas where athletic participation caused hindrances or sometimes brought about negative consequences resulting in an individual not being permitted to participate in a particular athletic season. These areas often focused on substance abuse (Eccles & Barber, 1999; Fredericks & Eccles, 2008, 2010), stress (Marsh et al., 2016), and a drop in academic performance due to overscheduling the time of our youth (Mahoney & Vest, 2012). As times have changed and the amount of money professional athletes make continues to rise, the influence of negative role models has become an area of great concern. The drive to be the next million dollar athlete inspires students to place more importance on athletics and less on their academics. Some of these athletes are following the same off the field behavior as their role models and are getting involved in risky behavior that might impact their future plans. This tends to give credence to the fact that some of the students who benefit from athletic participation also face temptations that lead to making poor choices (Eccles & Barber, 1999; Fredericks & Eccles, 2010; Gillman, Myers, & Perez, 2004).

Researchers have noted positive outcomes when relating athletic participation to successful outcomes for youth (Im et al., 2016; Peck et al., 2008; Theis, 2014). Organized athletic programs in schools promote growth in young children and help them to develop the sense of belonging to a group, higher self-esteem, and the motivation needed to be academically successful (Dawes & Larson, 2011; Fredericks & Eccles, 2008; Im et al., 2016). Additionally, athletic participation seems to allow individuals to develop their own identity that transcends their past and allows them to develop in ways that do not define who they are in a classroom setting (Gilman et al., 2004). It is possible that the classroom behavior of student-athletes can be affected by what they learn after school on a field, in a gym, or at the local church.

Benefits of Athletic Participation

There are many positive qualities associated with the participation in extracurricular athletics. Among these positive aspects are the relationships that develop in the social aspects of an individual's life (Broh, 2002; Dawes & Larson, 2011; Fredericks & Eccles, 2005; Guest, 2018). Additionally, there are many benefits associated with the psychological foundations developed by students as they attend school. Some of the benefits include, but are not limited to, educational resiliency, motivation, increased effort, and better educational success in postsecondary education (Dawes & Larson, 2011; Fredericks & Eccles, 2008; Peck et al., 2008; Williams et al., 2014). Lastly, academic success has been positively associated with increased participation in extracurricular athletics (Abruzzo et al., 2016; Fredericks & Eccles, 2010; Morris, 2016; Zaff et al., 2003).

Prosocial. Prosocial activity involves learning that sometimes there is a need to put others' needs before one's own. There is evidence that motivation is affected by an individual's ability to form goals that benefit others before they consider their own needs (Dawes & Larson, 2011). This prosocial ability promotes the development of stronger relationships with friends, teammates, and family members and is considered a benefit of participation in school-sponsored athletics.

Many researchers looked at the benefits of being part of the team or being a member of the "in crowd" as a benefit for individuals participating in athletics. The social capital argument states that individuals obtain benefits such as greater opportunities for social interaction, stronger family ties, and increased trust among friends and family, through being a member of a certain social group (Broh, 2002). Social capital relates to the changes individuals go through when they are part of a group that is seen, noticed, and sometimes idolized by others due to their ability

to excel in a particular sport. The social capital argument often leads to the person being involved in activities or associated with certain groups they may not have been included in prior to being part of the team (Broh, 2002; Feldman & Matjasko, 2005; Hughes et al., 2016).

Additionally, challenges can arise when a student learns to deal with diverse people who have differing personalities and behaviors. Studies show that athletic participation develops opportunities for students to work with individuals in a way that is different than in-class activities, and it requires students to think in a way that is different than how they interact with others in a classroom setting. Bakoban and Aljarallah (2015) stated that “Working outside of the classroom with diverse groups of individuals allows students to gain more self-confidence, autonomy, and appreciation for others’ differences and similarities” (p. 2737).

The final prosocial interaction that promotes positive growth in individuals relates not only to the participant, but also to the family members who support the students in and outside of school. According to many studies (Burchinal et al., 2008; Driessens, 2015; Eccles et al., 2003), communication between parents, students, and educators improves through connections made during the time in which the individual participates in athletics. Broh (2002) concluded that athletics often allows coaches, parents, and students to develop an avenue for communication that extends beyond an athletic event and into the classroom. This communication is even more vital for high-risk students who need strong parenting to counteract the factors that may set them up to fail as they transition to a higher, more demanding level of education (Burchinal et al., 2008; Condly, 2006; Driessens, 2015).

Psychological. In addition to the prosocial benefits of athletics, many researchers have determined that youth and young adults alike benefit psychologically from participation in organized athletics. As students play a sport, compete in academic competitions, or worship in a

youth group at their family church, their self-esteem and self-worth often increase as they begin to relate to and develop relationships with others in the same group (Finn & Rock, 1997; Fredericks & Eccles, 2005; Williams et al., 2014).

Other researchers concluded that student-athletes do not get the complete benefit of the activity unless they become involved, not only physically, but psychologically as well. Dawes and Larson (2011) maintained that student-athletes will not benefit simply from attending the event, but they must become engaged both physically and psychologically. This philosophy blends well with the belief that individuals develop a bond with those involved in the activity and create a family-like relationship as the group grows and develops throughout the time spent together. Unfortunately, that development is not always positive. Some groups engage in bullying-type behavior, drinking, or other activities that negatively affect the psychological development of both the perpetrator and the victim (Fredericks & Eccles, 2010).

Another issue linked to extracurricular participation is the inequity of participation and the emphasis placed on limiting the number of individuals who can participate. Individuals who are cut or removed from a team atmosphere tend to suffer emotionally and psychologically (Barnett, 2007). Individuals who make the team tend to benefit socially, academically, and psychologically. Those who do not get selected are sometimes left behind and reach out to others for what they feel they are missing by not being a member of the team (Barnett, 2007). Many institutions and schools are still promoting the “no pass/ no play” policies that attempted to promote academic urgency and defined the purpose of educational facilities as places where students go to receive an education (Burnett, 2001; Barnett, 2007). Unfortunately, the results are not always what the policy was designed to accomplish, and some students tend to lose the one thing, playing sports, that gets them out of bed and off to school.

Academic. The final benefit discussed in this literature review revolves around one that can help all students reach their academic potential. Broh (2002) reported that “total extracurricular activity participation (TEAP) is associated with improved grade-point average, higher educational aspirations, increased college attendance, and reduced absenteeism” (p. 70).

Ultimately, this benefit can provide individuals with greater self-concepts and can result in higher academic goals and lower dropout rates for individuals considered at-risk due to behavior issues and high rates of absenteeism (Abruzzo et al., 2016; Eccles & Barber, 1999; Morris, 2016). As students develop their academic skills and knowledge base, they have a greater chance to continue their education beyond their high school years. Although many schools provide vast opportunities to participate in athletics, a school system’s ultimate goal should be to provide students with the tools and internal motivation they need to continue academic growth beyond their high school years and to become productive members of society (Zaff et al., 2003).

Barriers of Athletic Participation

Several researchers found that although most of the effects of athletic participation are positive, some individuals choose to participate in risky behavior that can result in negative consequences including suspension from school, arrest, and even death (Broh, 2002; Eccles & Barber, 1999; Fredericks & Eccles, 2005). Typically, this behavior is a result of students becoming part of social groups whose mentality becomes that of the “superior” group or the group whose success will “fix” any problem that may occur relating to individuals who are not part of the group. It is understandable that barriers are also a component of the studies due to the risk associated with the involvement in inappropriate, antisocial, or deviant behavior. Due to the various risks to the individual and to those who are affected by the negative behaviors, it is a

logical step to define which behaviors, if any, are enhanced or deterred through the peer influences associated with athletic participation. The following sections discuss some negative behaviors sometimes associated with athletic participation (Brechwald & Prinstein, 2011; Driessens, 2015; Fredericks & Eccles, 2010), the possibility of overscheduling students who spend an excessive amount of time in sports (Fredericks, 2010; Mahoney & Vest, 2012), and accounts for other factors such as race, gender, and socioeconomic status (Chen & Harklau, 2017; Covay & Carbonaro, 2010).

Substance Abuse and Sexual Behavior. The first area that has been significantly correlated to participation in athletics for junior and senior high school athletes is substance abuse (Brechwald & Prinstein, 2011; Driessens, 2015). This often takes the form of alcohol consumption but has advanced into the use of prescription medications and illegal drug use (Eccles & Barber, 1999; Fredericks & Eccles, 2010). Often, individuals with drug abuse problems later in life attribute their addiction to a sports injury, where they received and became addicted to pain medication as part of their treatment. Doctors today monitor this issue, but they still prescribe medications that are addictive when they feel it is the most appropriate method of treatment. Either way, introducing young individuals to these types of drugs will always come at a risk.

Additionally, some studies have shown that there is an increase in sexual activity amongst individuals who participate in different sports (Barnett, 2007; Fredericks & Eccles, 2010). Some studies attribute this to the positive relationships developed between more popular individuals and those who have lower self-esteem (Barnett, 2007; Brechwald & Prinstein, 2011), while others determined that factors such as race and SES seemed to correlate to the poor behavior as much as the participation in any particular sport (Fredericks & Eccles, 2010).

Studies showed that these externalizing behaviors are much more prevalent in older students and tend to start during the mid to late high school years (Driessens, 2015; Eccles et al., 2003; Fredericks & Eccles, 2010).

Although these behaviors are evident in some studies, many researchers have also found that involvement in structured athletics decreases the number of occurrences in which individuals make poor choices. As individuals participate in sports, they develop support groups and social networks that give them alternative choices to participating in undesirable activities. Sports participation also increases the pool of people they can talk to when they are considering which behaviors are appropriate and which should be eliminated from consideration (Eccles et al., 2003). Another important factor noted by researchers was that the more activities an individual participates in, the less time they will have to participate in undesirable activities such as drug and alcohol use (Denault & Poulin, 2009; Fredericks, 2011; Mahoney & Vest, 2012; Marsh & Kleitman, 2002). Fredericks and Eccles (2010) concluded that when other variables are accounted for, including SES, race, gender, and certain aged students, the participation in athletics decreases negative behavior and increases civic engagement for those individuals. Ultimately, the effects of all variables are very hard to determine as they often correlate to the various types of individuals who participate in the different sports.

Deviant and Antisocial Behavior. Deviant and antisocial behaviors are not uncommon with middle school-aged and high school-aged individuals who participate in various activities related to the school. Bullying, alienation of individuals and prejudiced attitudes have been linked to peer influences that resulted from relationships developed during athletic participation (Driessens, 2015; Fredericks & Simpkins, 2013; Marsh & Kleitman, 2002). These behaviors sometimes lead to depression, eating disorders, poor self-image, self-injury, and in extreme

cases, suicide; and these negative behaviors affect not only the individual in the group but those who are the victims of the behaviors. Although these behaviors exist outside of the realm of athletics, the peer influences and feelings derived from being part of the self-considered “in crowd” seem to promote the idea that the individuals associated with certain teams or groups are better than everyone else (Brechwald & Prinstein, 2011).

Oftentimes, educators find it difficult to understand why individuals act this way. Some have suggested that poor behavior may be due to how students were raised or that some students just do not care about themselves or what others think about them. The answer may lie within the individual and those they allow to influence their behavior. Brechwald and Prinstein (2011) related their actions to a sense of belonging, fitting in with the group, matching the norms of the group, or simply using the behavior as a way to improve their self-image. Unfortunately, this way of thinking negatively impacts the culture and climate of everyone associated with the group, school, and community as a whole.

Overscheduling. Early research involving extracurricular athletics tended to focus on the time spent participating and the fact that this time took away from an individual’s ability to study and learn (Fredericks, 2012). Furthermore, the amount of pressure put on these individuals to succeed added to the issues some have with self-confidence and has been known to contribute to the previously mentioned issue of substance abuse. The excessive participation has been identified as the over-scheduling hypothesis (Fredericks, 2012; Mahoney & Vest, 2012).

Throughout their research, Mahoney and Vest (2012) took many variables into consideration. As they analyzed deeper into the data, they determined that the results were overwhelmingly positive and that “organized activity participation is a significant predictor of several indicators of positive adjustment and is unrelated to several indicators of problematic

adjustment at young adulthood” (p. 415). With this being said, there is a limit on the time an individual should spend playing sports. Weekly participation should not exceed 20 hours per week or it can lead to negative impacts for students (Mahoney & Vest, 2012).

Additional Factors Possibly Affecting Student-Athletes

Accounting for Race, Gender, Age, and SES. Although there are many variables that affect the individuals who participate in athletics, race is one of the most constant variables taken into account when determining outcomes. White females tend to be the individuals who participate most often in athletics, followed closely by white males. Minority students tend to participate less frequently in athletics and fail to obtain the same benefits associated with participation (Chen & Harklau, 2017; Covay & Carbonaro, 2010; Feldman & Matjasko, 2005; Fredericks & Eccles, 2010). It has also been acknowledged by some researchers that Latino students gain a lot of the prosocial aspects, but often fail to transfer what they learn through athletic participation into success in the classroom (Chen & Harklau, 2017).

Participation in athletics tends to favor students who come from families with a higher socioeconomic background. Many researchers feel that as students reach the upper grade levels, they cannot participate due to the fact that they cannot afford the cost or they have to work to help with their family (Bennett et al., 2012; Covay & Carbonaro, 2010; Dawes et al., 2015; Feldman & Matjasko, 2005; Fredericks & Eccles, 2008). This unequal ability to participate makes the research difficult to conduct, but it can be accounted for when determining the effects of athletic participation. With students from low SES backgrounds, it must be noted that athletics offer these individuals a way to develop skills that may be beneficial in working their way out of poverty. If the individual is able to participate, the protective factors of family, school, and community allow these participants to gain new character traits that lead to the

strong social and psychological factors that promote the resiliency needed to be successful beyond their time on the field or in the classroom (Abelev, 2009).

Finally, the age and gender of the participants must be accounted for when looking at the results of various studies. Benefits have been examined in elementary, middle school, high school, and postsecondary male and female students with varying results. Most results have been determined to be positive, but outcomes vary at different levels of maturity and the gender of the individuals (Fischer & Theis, 2014; Fredericks & Eccles, 2008; Schaefer et al., 2011). Despite gender, students in grades 11 and 12 tend to be the individuals who become involved in these types of activities most frequently and often times are affected by the consequences well beyond their high school years.

Important Organizational Aspects of Athletic Participation

To understand the importance of the aforementioned variables and outcomes, it is important to understand that not only do the types of sports make a difference, but so too does the quality of the activity and how often one participates. Although some activities practice on a daily basis, others can go months between meetings. This is an essential aspect to take into consideration when determining whether participation has a profound effect on those who choose to participate in that particular activity (Fischer & Theis, 2014; Fredericks & Eccles, 2010; Guest, 2018; Im et al., 2016).

Quality. Although quality is often evaluated by the participants, this information is valuable to assessing the connection between the activity and the effects seen in the individuals. Ultimately, this can be determined by the coach's ability to make connections with the students and the individual's identification as a true participant in all that is associated with the sport. The quality of the program is not measured in wins and losses but in the connections the students

make through participation and how it allows them to grow as an individual (Fischer & Theis, 2014; Meyers & Perez, 2004).

The quality of the support given to these individuals by the school itself has an effect on student growth. As with all activities related to the school, athletics must share goals with the academic and social focus of the whole school. When the activity and school share goals, the reaffirmation of the goals throughout the day tends to solidify the outcomes desired by those who felt the goals were necessary to produce positive outcomes throughout the students' educational careers. Fischer and Theis (2014) concluded that the positive effects surrounding athletic participation are more advanced in schools that support the social growth of the students and make them feel as though they are part of the school. The belief in the statement "where it takes a village to raise a child" is solidified when athletics become a primary supporter of the goals developed by those who are leaders in the village.

Assessing the outcomes could be determined using both quantitative and qualitative data, depending on what the researcher is looking for as a result. Researchers must take into account the external variables that may skew the results they are analyzing. Guest (2018) put this truth into perspective when he stated that the context and quality of the extracurricular activity is just as important, if not more so, than the specific type of activity.

Breadth, Frequency, and Duration. Researchers have also analyzed at the number of activities the individuals participate in and how often these activities meet (Denault & Poulin, 2009; Fredericks, 2011). Mahoney and Vest (2012) claimed that 20 hours per week of participation tends to be the limit for an individual before the positive benefits start to show a decline. Other researchers look at the fact that individuals who participate in athletics year after year benefit more with each passing year of participation. Bohnert et al. (2010) affirmed this

statement by concluding that the more successive years that an individual plays a sport, the more benefits they may see as a result.

Although there is research that focuses on the positive aspects of repeated activities, some researchers limit those benefits by stating that the correlation between positive results is sometimes more prevalent when examining the patterns of participation versus the number of years that the individual participates (Im et al., 2016). Another aspect of this involves patterns that examine students who participate at various times throughout the school year. Skipping seasons or delaying participation is much more beneficial for students when comparing it to students who participate one year and never again (Im et al., 2016). This solidifies the need for students to work diligently to keep their grades up and obtain eligibility to participate in athletics throughout the year. Researchers have also concluded that participation in structured, organized activities during mid-to late-adolescent years is vital when it comes to successful outcomes later in their academic life (Denault & Poulin, 2009; Fredericks, 2011; Fredericks & Eccles, 2008).

With this added information, it can be said that students benefit if they put the effort in to growing and developing the positive traits. Placing limitations on their participation may also place limitations on the positive outcomes that result from their being part of the team or a valuable member of the group. Furthermore, other aspects of the sport could be examined to determine the value they add in developing the participants. Characteristics that could be considered when assessing the value of the sport are the strength of the sponsor, the level of structure in the activity, whether the individuals compete during the various types of activities, whether they are required to “make the team,” if they have the opportunity to lead, and whether the activity stresses the development of social skills needed to interact with others (Brown, 2013).

In summary, I analyzed the various benefits such as prosocial, psychological, and academic success while noting that barriers such as deviant behavior and overscheduling can also be related to athletic participation. Additionally, I explained how additional factors like race, gender, SES, and the quality of the athletic program may play an important role in the success and motivation of an individual. All of these factors work in unison to develop the landscape of an individual as they strive to be successful in the classroom. Moving forward to qualitative research, the researchers look beyond the numbers and find the meaning participants place on the experience. Qualitative research allows a researcher to delve deeper to find meaning in the context of how and why a particular situation takes place and how it affects the participants the way it does (Schrack-Walters, O'Donnell, & Wardlow, 2008).

Qualitative Studies on Athletic Participation

Quantitative studies give researchers valuable knowledge about the statistics and relationships various data points have with each other in a given study. They do not, however, adequately address the how and why questions that help the researcher understand how a particular case study had certain results or why a particular phenomenon seems to happen at one location and not another. The research in Table 2 is a summary of qualitative studies that have a primary focus on students-athletes and the benefits and barriers the participants associated with athletic participation.

TABLE 2*Key characteristics and results of various qualitative studies.*

Study	Sample	Study	Purpose	Findings
Bjornsen & Dinkel 2017	14 College Coaches	Phenomenological	Examine transitional experiences from coach's perspective.	College athletes tend to struggle with the transition with current support. Additional support, such as mentoring and career workshops would help.
Fredericks et al. 2002	41 Adolescents grade 9 -12	Qualitative	Enhance the understanding of factors that determine athletic commitment over time.	There are many positive outcomes associated with athletic participation. Students participate because they are good and their friends play.
Holt et al. 2008	12 male athletes and the coach	Qualitative	Examine whether youth learn life skills by participating in sports.	Student-athletes learn life skills through the structure and example displayed by the coach and developed as a team.
Lyons et al. 2018	13 college freshman	Phenomenological	Investigate college transition for former	Transition time is enhanced by cultivating a

			athletes who no longer participate in sports.	network of individuals and becoming active in college activities and clubs that benefit the student.
Martin & Horn 2013	186 female high school athletes	Mixed method	Investigate whether identity and passion for athletics could predict burnout.	Enjoying the sport and their teammates prevented burnout, where passion for the sport increased mental and physical exhaustion.
Romo 2011	8 Mexican-American collegiate football players	Phenomenological	Determine how the student-athletes' perception of culture influence their achievements in football at the college level.	There were both positive and negative influences. Struggles academically and adjusting to the new culture were negatives, while proving they could compete at a higher level and being part of a team were positive aspects that helped with the transition.
Schrack-Walters et al. 2008	11 Male College Athletes	Qualitative	Exploring the motives and benefits of athletic participation.	Student-athletes find as much joy in developing the team "family" as they do in winning. Most

athletes do not
seek individual
praise over team
success.

Benefits of Athletic Participation

Similar to the qualities described in the quantitative research section, the qualitative research had a primary focus on the same three aspects. Researchers often discussed the prosocial aspects of athletic participation and how these experiences provided valuable resources needed for students to be successful in various aspects of their lives (Bjornsen & Dinkel, 2017; Fredricks et al., 2002; Holt et al., 2008; Romo, 2011; Xerri et al., 2017). Discussing the psychological benefits, researchers asked questions which allowed participants to discuss improvements in their self-worth and intrapersonal benefits of playing sports (Bjornsen & Dinkel, 2017; Fredricks et al., 2002; Schrack-Walters et al., 2008). Academic performance was also mentioned but seemed to be less significant than the others (Bjornsen & Dinkel, 2017; Hughes et al., 2016). The qualitative research describes in greater detail the experiences of the participants and the meaning they placed on sports during their educational careers and throughout their lives.

Prosocial. Athletics provided players the opportunity to be a part of a team. Sports also allowed the athlete an alternative way to be successful in one or more aspects of their lives. However, the participants in these studies described a deeper meaning behind athletic participation and how they felt about their teammates and coaches. Family members were seen as a form of support, but they were not always a constant in the lives of the athletes. Participating in athletics was described as a way for the individuals to be a bigger part of the

community and develop a social system outside of their family that changed their lives in a positive manner (Hughes et al., 2016; Romo, 2011).

Teammates, friends and coaches became what the participants described as family. Coaches were described as strong leaders and were likened to parents the participants never had. Teammates were called brothers and sisters and there was a deeper relationship that went beyond the field, court, or the course (Schrack-Walters et al., 2008; Xerri et al., 2017). Student-athletes began placing more emphasis on the team and less on themselves. The student-athletes described times when they worked harder to be a part of something that was bigger than themselves and felt they pushed harder to reach a higher level allowing them to remain part of the “family.” Student-athletes developed social skills that increased their motivation to perform at a higher level than they would have without the desire to be a part of the team.

Psychological. A common saying is that there is no “I” in team. The research supported this saying, but also described ways that the participants benefited on a more individual level. Participants described their experiences in athletic participation as a way to develop self-worth, challenge themselves to do more, enjoy the competition, and develop skills to help them transition from one important time in their lives to another (Fredricks et al., 2002; Romo, 2011; Schrack-Walters et al., 2008).

Participants in the studies described times in their lives when they felt they came to an impasse and had to look deep inside themselves for answers to life’s problems. The skills needed to get through such times and the motivation to push forward were often developed through athletic participation and encouraged the individuals to tackle life’s problems head on (Holt et al., 2008, Xerri et al., 2017). Although success is never guaranteed, athletic participation

taught the participants how to be humble winners and accept defeat as a motivating factor to work harder.

Academics. Many of the participants in these studies understood that the privilege of playing sports was closely associated to their success in the classroom. Many student-athletes saw athletics as an extension of the classroom (Bjornsen & Dinkel, 2017; Denault & Guay, 2017, Eccles & Roesner, 2004). The participants explained that there is always a level of respect associated with athletics and part of being a true teammate is to perform well academically. Although the connection existed between being a part of the team and doing everything they could to remain a part of the team/family outside the classroom, the responsibility of performing well in the classroom fell on the individual student-athlete.

Athletic participation had many benefits associated with being a part of a bigger purpose and involved the participants in many different ways. As these individuals looked beyond their own success and strove to be better for the others on their team, they found the motivation to go beyond where they were before. However, with those benefits there were also barriers to student success that were evident in some of the qualitative studies outlined in Table 2.

Barriers

Although there were many positive aspects of athletic participation for student-athletes, researchers discovered barriers similar to what was discussed in the quantitative study portion of this chapter. Overscheduling, stress, fatigue, and learning to cope with the hardships sometimes associated with athletic participation were barriers that sometimes resulted in burnout and caused the student athletes to no longer participate in sports.

Overscheduling. Student-athletes often found it difficult to balance the time needed to be at the top of their game on the field and in the classroom. These participants mentioned the

stress associated with devoting the time needed to be competitive on the field and the time needed to remain effective in the classroom. The multiple commitments left little flexibility and made enjoying success in either area difficult (Bjornsen & Dinkel, 2017; Fredricks et al., 2002; Martin & Horn, 2013). Participants often felt pulled in different directions and often had to give in one area to be successful in the other.

Psychological. The pressure student-athletes put on themselves to be the best at whatever they did often led to psychological issues that they felt became unmanageable. The participants described how the stress of being judged and the difficulty of dealing with failure often led to their no longer participating in athletics (Fredricks et al., 2002; Romo, 2011; Schrack-Walters et al., 2008). Individuals who felt they were doing all they could to be the best at what they did had to learn to deal with failure and see past the judgements of others who felt they were less than capable of being a productive member of the team.

Important Aspects of Athletic Participation

A vital area to keeping student-athletes motivated on the field and/or in the classroom was developing a social system within the team which helped the individual get through the tough times. According to some, having a coach who modeled strong beliefs and led by example was imperative to guiding the student-athletes in making good choices and staying motivated to always give their best in whatever they did in life (Holt et al., 2008; Schrack-Walters et al., 2008).

Additionally, the student-athletes need a combination of different support structures and motivation factors, like being part of a team, to get them through the failures and disappointments associated with being a student-athlete. These individuals excelled when they

were having fun participating with their teammates, but they also needed the support of multiple individuals in their lives to be there through the ups and downs associated with athletics.

A common theme that was evident in much of the research was that there is value in the relationships that are built between the student-athlete, teammates, and coaches. Often, the team was described as family and the teammates were called brothers and sisters. As seen in the above research, these relationships helped the individuals adapt to new environments, battle through adversity, learn life skills, and become productive members of the team. Individuals placed the team before themselves and placed the importance of individual recognition behind that of the team's success. Despite age, culture, and gender differences, the individuals continually focused on the friendships that were built on the field or court as positive outcomes from athletic participation.

Additionally, the researchers often discussed the importance of finding ways for individuals to replace those relationships after they were no longer competing were are making the transition from high school to the next stage in their life (Lyons, 2018). Mentors and programs where individuals are a part of a support group were common recommendations in the research for ways that student-athletes could continue experiencing the positive relationships similar to those they experienced while being a part of the team. Taking the findings of the above research and building on their findings was a valuable piece to understanding the phenomenon in my study.

Theoretical Framework

To accurately assess what researchers had determined as motivating factors for student-athletes, I examined the results using the self-determination theory. Bartholomew, Ntoumanis, Ryan, Bosch, and Thøgersen-Ntoumani (2011) defined SDT as “a perspective on human

motivation and personality that focuses on the social-environmental conditions that enhance versus diminish self-motivation and healthy psychological adjustment” (p. 1159). As stated in chapter one, there are many factors associated with human motivation and how individuals react to different conditions present in their lived experiences. In determining what it was that I truly wanted to understand from my study, I hoped to discover what motivational factors the participants related to the experience of playing athletics and to find ways they could be used outside the realm of athletics.

SDT focuses on the belief that all human beings have basic psychological needs that must be met for an individual to be psychologically healthy. These three needs are competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2008). These needs help experts to predict how an individual’s social environment might affect their mental health and lead to the motivation needed to be successful. However, it is important to note that within each individual, one or more of these needs may be more prevalent and may have deeper meaning to why it affects that individual and instigates personal development.

Deci and Ryan, who developed SDT, confirmed that within this theory there are two concepts that demonstrate differences in individuals. These are causality orientations and life goals. The first is determined by the way the individual relates to the environment when information it presents focuses on the regulation of behavior. Within this section, there are three different orientations autonomous, controlled, and impersonal. Although all three are present in every individual, one or more of them often appears to be stronger and more prevalent in certain types of people and during certain times in their lives. An autonomous orientation relates more towards positive mental health and can lead to behavioral changes in an individual. A controlled orientation relates more to the external factors that are used to make changes in one’s behavior

through rigid rules and regulations. Lastly, an impersonal orientation is associated with the individual beating themselves up and causing instances of self-derogation (Deci & Ryan, 2008). All change the way a person develops, but some do so in a more positive way.

Life goals are concepts that also determine how an individual responds to life experiences. Life goals tend to be associated with a student's sense of success and self-worth. Sometimes life goals replace negative experiences and motivate students to work harder to reach their goals, while other times they serve as another life experience where the individual fails to live up to their own expectations. The way individuals set their goals and to what extent they strive to pursue them determines how their success or lack thereof will affect their personal development (Deci & Ryan, 2008).

SDT has been employed to examine many aspects of student motivation and can be useful in the analysis of a phenomenon in determining whether each piece leads to more motivation and positive outcomes for the student (Ryan & Deci, 2008). Often the motivating characteristics are at the core of athletic success and give student-athletes a reason to try hard and go beyond what is expected of them. Athletics offers an opportunity for students to experience the characteristics of success beyond the classroom setting and gives them a source of motivation that may otherwise not be present.

Summary

In providing a brief summary on what researchers found relating to athletic participation and how it promotes academic success, I provided a foundation on which I built my study. I discussed athletic participation and the development of pro-social, psychological, and academic attributes, while also discussing the obstacles some student-athletes experience from athletic participation. Additionally, I summarized qualitative studies that analyzed deeper into the

meaning that the participants associated with the experience of participating in athletics.

Providing detail about the self-determination theory gave the reader a lens to view how this type of theoretical framework best fits my phenomenological study of student-athletes. Data collected from various resources that explored the positive and negative results of athletic participation using both quantitative and qualitative research allowed a holistic understanding of the diverse ways athletic participation affected student-athletes. The researchers examined variables including, but not always limited to, gender, age, SES, and race to investigate how these variables contributed to the findings and analysis of the data collected.

Although there were numerous factors included in the various research activities, the data differed in the date the research was collected, the number of participants analyzed in the study, and the type of individuals whose data was used in the research. These limitations account for some of the differing results that were reported and discussed, but the majority of the studies found positive attributes to athletic participation. My study examined the participants' perceptions of the motivating factors that drove them to be academically successful as they participated in sports, but which no longer motivated them after the conclusion of the athletic season.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODS

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the experiences that student-athletes from low SES backgrounds had playing school-sponsored athletics and understand if and how the student-athletes related those experiences to increased academic motivation. In conducting this study, the following research questions were addressed:

1. What meaning, if any, did student-athletes from low SES backgrounds ascribe to the experience of athletic participation as it related to their academic motivation?
2. What role did athletic participation play in increasing the student-athletes academic motivation?
3. What experiences changed at the conclusion of the athletic season that resulted in student-athletes performing at a lower level academically?

Having experienced parts of this phenomenon myself as a high school student created a link between the participants and me. Although steps were taken to limit the influence of my personal experiences, ultimately those experiences were a guide to understanding the experiences of the participants in my study (Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 2014). To develop the study, the central phenomenon was defined as student-athletes developing the motivation needed for academic success while participating in athletics, but not continuing the same level of motivation beyond the conclusion of the athletic season. In the following sections, I discuss the research design, context, instrumentation, methods for data collection and data analysis as well as the possible limitations of the study.

Positionality

As an individual who came from a low SES background, I often think about what has motivated me to continue my education to a level I never thought possible. I recall how little my parents interacted with me due to the need to provide a living for seven children. I was never upset about it and just thought of it as a necessity of life. Throughout my high school career, even though I had no plans to go to college, I worked hard to make the grades while participating in three sports for all four years of high school. Reflecting on those times in my life allowed me to see the family, teammates, and friends who were there for me through the death of a brother, struggles with passing trigonometry, and the alienation of being a person who could not afford gas to drive my car or money to go out to eat with the team. During the time I was part of the team, my coaches led me down the right path and my brothers in athletics were always there to pick me up and help me through the struggles I encountered on a daily basis.

Reflecting on my experiences and relating them to the answers given by the six participants, I felt myself back in school and on the team. I recalled the relationships I had with my teammates and how I would have done anything to help the team. Athletics was an area that did not have a cost associated with it. Despite the fact that I could not pay to play, I was given the opportunity to be a part of something bigger than anything else I had experienced in life. I had a family and I knew they loved me; but most significant to me was being on the team that won and lost together and was primarily focused on the team and not on the individual. However, I am now able to look at those experiences through a different lens. One that has seen success beyond what I could have ever imagined in high school. My life experiences allow me to limit my bias toward the findings because over the many years since high school, I have learned that the feelings I had that were similar to the participants, were such a small part of what

I learned while in school. I have learned my experiences while participating in high school athletics taught me more than what the six participants described during their interviews. It took me years to truly understand everything that I gained from being on a team. Although the participants are starting to experience life out of high school, they have a long way to go to understand the life-long implications of their time and effort given in the classroom.

In my twenty years as an educator, I have witnessed student-athletes who display educational success during various times of the year but fail to continue to perform at a comparable level when certain aspects no longer factor in to their educational performance. It is evident that students benefit from participation in extracurricular athletics in every stage of development (Dawes & Larson, 2011; Feldman & Matjasko, 2005; Guest, 2016). As an administrator in a high school setting, I have often noticed that students can achieve academic success during the season when grades are used to determine athletic eligibility, only for their grades to drop drastically once the season has finished. Later, those same students begin to work and complete the tasks needed to obtain the grades that will make them eligible for the next sport in which they plan on participating. To gain a better understanding of this pattern of academic inconsistency throughout the school year, and possible reasons for it, I conducted my phenomenology study.

Phenomenological Research Design

Phenomenological research looks at lived experiences of a group of individuals and finds common meaning in how they perceive the experience. The participants relate the way the experience seems in their conscience and connect it to underlying conditions that caused them to think or act in one way or another (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 2014).

In phenomenological research, hermeneutics, a lens that examines the experience and how the individual perceives what took place as a result, becomes a type of lens to look at the experiences in a way to derive meaning from what others perceive. By examining the experiences of others, I expanded my personal knowledge and find more connection between their motivation and athletic participation (Moustakas, 1994).

In choosing a phenomenological study, it was necessary to go beyond the argument that athletics can lead to academic motivation and success. Discovering the reason a student-athlete from a low SES background feels the experiences related to athletic participation were a motivator during the athletic season, but are not similarly motivated beyond the season, was the purpose of the study. Finding the motivation to be academically successful goes beyond the premise of which sports are better for student-athletes or whether coaches have a greater influence than parents; it gets to the foundation of what drives students to succeed. The purpose of phenomenology does not seek to argue or prove a point; it seeks to find meaning in what information is perceived by the participants (Flood, 2010).

This qualitative study was designed to understand how low SES student-athletes perceived the experience of athletic participation and how it related to academic success. Creswell and Poth (2018) asserted it is important for the researcher to relate to the experiences of their participants and then remove themselves to see how the experience affected each individual. In doing so, I found areas where the participants shared common perceptions on their experiences. Creswell and Poth (2018) also pointed out that this does not remove the researcher from the study, but it does allow the researcher to set his/her experiences aside and focus on the perceptions of the participants and how the phenomenon affected their lives.

The study included two models of phenomenological research. Using hermeneutics and the reflective-interpretive model allowed me to not only look at the phenomenon and better know myself as it related to the experience, but also helps the reader to gain an understanding of others based on their perception of what they experience (Moustakas, 1994). Hermeneutics starts with the wonder of how an experience gives of itself and results in the development of a meaningful experience as it relates to and is perceived by the individual experiencing the event (Van Manen, 2014). Hermeneutic phenomenology looks to find meaning that exists in the experience prior to the individual reflecting on what the experience meant to them at the time the event was occurring (Van Manen, 2014; Moustakas, 1994).

In conducting a study of the phenomenon, I first had to find common meaning in the perceptions of the participants and then reflect on how those experiences were similar or different to the other participants. Creswell and Poth (2017) stated that this method takes meaning from how a group of individuals perceives the experiences or phenomenon they have lived through. To understand the perceived reasons for varied levels of academic success, effort was focused on getting to the root of how students perceived athletics as beneficial and attempting to develop a better understanding of how levels of motivation for academic success changed, being higher during the sports season and decreasing at the conclusion of the season. Flood (2010) stated that “phenomenology is a philosophic attitude and research design. Its primary position is that the most basic human truths are accessible only through inner subjectivity” (p. 27).

In conjunction with hermeneutics, the reflective-interpretive process allowed participants to explain how they remember the experience and then reflect on their own interpretation of what the experience meant to them (Moustakas, 1994). This process highlights what the student has

learned about themselves since the event took place. It then applies the new knowledge to gain a better understanding of how the experience affected the path they chose to follow to get where they are today.

Using hermeneutics and the reflective-interpretive process, I determined the attributes of athletic participation that student-athletes who come from a low SES background perceived to have helped them obtain academic success. Attempting to determine how these individuals were able to break the constraints of being in a lower social class to excel academically during the athletic season, only to fall back into what was usually expected of students with a low SES background, was an important aspect for consideration.

Past student-athletes who displayed varying degrees of motivation were interviewed to gain a better understanding of what they perceived influenced their ability to be successful at one point and then less successful when they were not involved in athletics. This process allowed me to gain a clearer understanding of the perception of the event to the participant and how it related to their life experience. Additionally, providing the findings I developed from the interviews to the participants helped me to ensure that my interpretation was in line with how they felt when they reflected on their past experiences. The interview process encompassed what students felt helped them and what may have hindered their academic growth while developing more information on how these same students were able to perform at a higher level when participating in athletics.

A difficult part of the phenomenological study was developing a study from which others could understand its purpose and develop meaning in what was or was not found during the study. I was challenged with the task of taking the experiences of the participants, finding the perceived meaning, digging deeper to find the essence of why the phenomenon occurred, and

deciphering what resulted from the participants' experience (Flood, 2010). Additionally, due to the fact that a phenomenological study can never be truly replicated, I was tasked with the challenge of ensuring the validity of my results. In doing so, I remembered that the data should be taken in context of what the participants experienced. For a phenomenological study, the validity does not come from multiple researchers describing the research the same way; it gets validity when the external viewer understands what the person doing the research was able to see in the data (Ghirotto, 2016).

Committee Selection

After receiving permission from the Casperson Community School Corporation and Martin High School administration (pseudonyms), I contacted the selection committee selected by the administration. I first reached out to the administrators of Casperson High School as a possible starting point for the study and developed a selection committee there using administrators, coaches, and counselors. This process yielded two participants who agreed to do the study. Feeling that the number of participants was still too low, I added a second school to the study. It is important to know that the final school I selected was the same school where I was the acting principal while the participants attended the school.

To eliminate any bias, I created a selection committee and asked the assistant principal to lead the team from Martin High School. I gave them the same guidance and parameters that I had used at the other school and they selected four individuals who agreed to participate and were given the same information the others were given prior to agreeing to participate.

An important source for the selection committee was the academic records coordinator or someone who had access to students' historical grades. This individual had access to the grading and student information program and provided information on students who had qualified for

free or reduced meals as well as supplied the past grades for those students. Free and reduced information was used to determine if the students came from homes that qualified for reduced of free meals and book fees. Families receiving free meals and book fees are considered low socioeconomic status (SES) and this information was a factor in the selection of the participants for the study. This information led to the determination of which students were athletes who remained academically eligible throughout the complete season by demonstrating the minimal academic requirements set forth by the Indiana High School Athletic Association (IHSAA) by passing six core classes. Assuming that the student continued passing six classes each semester, the student completed the diploma requirements deemed necessary by the Indiana Department of Education (IDOE) and the School Board of Trustees for the high school. These academic criteria were selected due to the fact that students participating in the study must have completed the season to be considered successful.

Selection Criteria

Purposive sampling was used because I asked the committee to identify possible participants based on a predetermined set of criteria regarding the phenomenon (Miles et al., 2014; Savenye & Robinson, 2005). Participants were selected from two high schools, Casperson Senior High School and Martin high School (pseudonyms). Student-athlete grade history and athletic eligibility throughout high school were also major factors used by the selection committees to find possible participants. A meeting with the selection committee, a group including administration, counselors, and athletic coaches from CHS and MHS, was held to go over the criteria that was used to select the students. The criteria included academic records, athletic eligibility status, and recommendations from the coaches and administrators as they

related to the student-athlete and the determination if athletics may have had a meaningful connection to the student-athletes' academic success.

Participants were selected who came from low SES backgrounds and demonstrated varying levels of academic success. The student-athletes were academically more successful during their athletic seasons only to drop in academic performance once the season concluded. The participant selection started with a broad spectrum of individuals and was funneled down to a number that allowed me to obtain an adequate amount of data and that all participants experienced the same phenomenon. Although there were differences in the sports played, the participants came from a family who qualified for free and reduced meals and assistance with curricular materials throughout their high school career.

In selecting the number of participants and the types of student-athletes to interview, I needed to know what I wanted to learn from the study. In phenomenological studies, researchers tend to keep the number of participants low to allow them the opportunity to study the phenomena in depth and not to be overwhelmed with the amount of data collected (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Miles & Saldana, 2014). In keeping the participant total to between four and eight participants, the selection of individuals needed to be precise and meaningful. Additionally, sample sizes in phenomenology range from single individuals to hundreds of individuals who have experienced the specific phenomenon. Focus should not be on the sample size but instead should be on the selection process involving those individuals who had experienced the phenomenon and could inform the researcher of specifics as they related to the study (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The first step involved working with the coordinator of academic records to collect the names of all of the students who had identified as low SES and who had demonstrated varying levels of academic success. Next, the selection committee determined which of those

students had participated in athletics during their time at CHS and MHS. The sports offered for boys during the school year included: football, cross country, tennis, soccer, basketball, swimming, wrestling, track, golf, and baseball. Girls could participate in cheerleading, golf, cross country, gymnastics, basketball, softball, soccer, tennis, swimming, and track. Any documents or lists of issues, such as academic probation, were also used by the committee to determine academic success throughout the student-athlete's time in school.

The age of participants was also a crucial aspect that was considered when selecting the individuals. Students who had graduated within the past two years were selected because of their ability to remember the experiences related to the phenomenon and have the mental capacity to relate that meaning to their experiences. Brain development is accelerated for high school students who are developing at an earlier age, but the lack of real-life experiences tends to hinder the development of working memory in adolescents and makes it difficult for them to make connections between what they are experiencing and what it means to their future (Evans & Fuller-Rowell, 2013; Singer, Rexhaj, & Baddeley, 2007; Thomason et al., 2008).

The rationale for selecting students who have graduated revolves around the life experiences that give the participants a new perspective on their past. Studies have shown that students growing up in poverty typically suffer from more chronic stress which may impair working memory as they enter young adulthood (Evans & Fuller-Rowell, 2013). Students currently in high school have not had the experiences needed to develop their working memory and reasoning skills necessary for associating their experiences to the phenomenon they are demonstrating (Thomason et al., 2008). Once students graduate and are forced to make real-world decisions, they start to develop meaning from their experiences and can develop a control system to their thoughts and perceptions of their past experiences (Gopnik, 2012; Singer et al.,

2007). The experiences of life beyond high school allow the participants to link their lived experiences to situations, which develops their working memories and brings meaning to what they have or have not accomplished in their recent past. “In essence, one of the reasons the cognitive-control system of adults is more effective than that of adolescents is that adults’ brains distribute its regulatory responsibilities across a wider network of linked components” (Steinberg, 2007, p. 57).

Determining whether the participants related the experience of athletic participation to their academic success was an important part of the interview process. With the change in educational levels and the constant change in requirements for graduation, the focus was on those individuals who had achieved at minimum at the basic level (currently labeled the general diploma) required to be considered a graduate in the state of Indiana.

Committee Selection of Participants

Students’ who met the age and SES requirements were selected. Those students’ grades were examined by the selection committee throughout their high school years to determine if their academics had been affected by nonparticipation in additional sports or if there had been a drop shortly after the individuals had qualified to finish the season and grades had become less of an issue as they related to athletic participation. The opinion of the selection committee and the student-athletes was considered in relation to the grades achieved and the overall belief that the participant may not have successfully completed high school had it not been for the experiences they had while participating in school-sponsored athletics.

Once the committee selected the possible participants, they worked with me to determine whether or not the study was feasible with the sample available. Patterns of effort and grades were compared to the specific sport and the timing in which the athlete needed to have the grades

required to be academically eligible. Next, the information was used to determine which students-athletes had demonstrated strong academic qualities while participating in athletics, but had allowed their academic performance to decline once the season was over.

Participant Contact

I was given contact information for the possible participant's parents by the committee and started the process of reaching out to them to make contact with the graduates. After receiving information on the possible participants, I contacted them and information on the study and all aspects related to their voluntary participation in the study was given to the candidates on the phone. When they were unavailable by phone, I sent an informative letter that described the study and what their responsibilities would be as a participant. The letter (Appendix B) asked for permission to obtain additional information through an interview process that would be recorded and analyzed to determine similarities in other student-athletes in relation to their perception of the phenomenon being studied. When the participants felt that their participation in athletics had led to higher academic performance, or even completion of high school, they made an educated decision as to whether they would like to participate and would be a fit to the purpose of the study. Only then was consent for participation distributed and collected by me (Appendix C).

All participants were contacted following their successful completion of high school or upon their decision to leave school. The selected individuals were contacted once their contact information was obtained. The determination to use athletes who had completed high school was made due to the fact that many of the individuals may not have reflected on their academic history until they were confronted with the aspects of life after high school. Life plans and goals may have changed their perspectives and resulted in fewer opportunities due to lack of academic

achievement prior to graduation. Additionally, phenomenological research is a focus on the lived experience in which the participants reflect on the experiences of their life or phenomenological reflection (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 2014).

Instrumentation and Data Collection

The initial process for collecting data was to obtain approval from the Ball State Institutional Review Board and the administration of both schools to conduct interviews of past students from Casperson Senior High School and Martin High School who met the established criteria. The participants were offered a neutral sight to complete the interviews, but felt they were comfortable meeting with me at the school where I am the principal. The interviews themselves took place within a private room that was convenient for the participants and was available during a time that did not affect the subjects' personal schedules. I made sure that the room was not a common place where I would have been seen during the times they attended the school and an area that was not related to any discipline or negative events they may have experience at MHS. All meetings were recorded with a digital recorder and a talk to text application as a backup for any possible technical issue and to ensure accuracy. An outline of the interview was created prior to the interview. Notes were added throughout the interview process. In searching for common themes, accurate data collection was imperative for a valid experiment, and questions were added during the interview process as deemed necessary.

While developing the meaning behind what the participants felt promoted academic success while participating in athletics, flexibility allowed the participants to take the lead in the interpretation of their life experiences. Basic questions were used to break the ice and develop trust between the participant and me. However, willingness to follow the story of the participant

allowed the direction of the interview to develop and create the foundation of the phenomenon. Englander (2012) stated that the interviewer should not start the interview with traditional questions but instead should allow the participant to describe their experience and the situation or situations that led to the phenomenon.

Throughout the phenomenological study, I was the primary instrument responsible for data collection and analysis. Creswell (2014) concluded that the researcher is the key instrument in performing a phenomenological study. He clarified by stating that the researcher often finds better results by going into the field and meeting with the participants where they experience the phenomenon. Throughout the process, interaction with the selected participants was imperative and was performed through interviews that focused on their personal experiences with athletic participation and personal characteristics that had been developed to ensure academic success. Interviews consisted of open-ended questions (Appendix C) and were recorded and transcribed to ensure accuracy of data.

The interview process was a vital aspect of the study. When conducting the study, it was imperative to ensure the differences between the interviewees and their perceptions of the phenomenon were understood. The purpose of the interview was for me to experience the phenomenon through the reflections of the participant (Englander, 2012). The key was to allow the individual to feel comfortable enough to open up and describe their experience as they remember what happened during their time in the class or on the field. Allowing for flexibility in the responses allowed the participant to discover new experiences and put meaning to what they lived at that time in their life. I needed only to listen and reflect upon what was being said to “coauthor” the data (Miles et al., 2014). I had to always remember that qualitative research is like a living being; it changes and adapts to get to the core of the experience (Miles et al., 2014).

As part of the process, participants were asked to recollect information from their total high school experience. Participants who were involved in athletics as early as their freshman year were included in the study due to the fact that this represented an important time in their developmental life. According to Schwartz and colleagues (2015), the transition time from middle to high school is a critical time in the development of individuals. Often, middle school presents the first time that students must meet academic requirements to participate in athletics; and with this new focus on athletics being tightly associated with academic performance, the freshman year was determined to be the ideal age to start the timeline for participants to recollect their experiences.

I wanted to ensure that the questions I was asking the participants would result in informative answers and not just a yes or no. I started the process of writing the questions and working with my son and some of his high school friends asking them the questions and adapting the questions to get as much information as I could. If I received simple answers from them, I reworded the questions and rephrased them in a way that required them not only to answer the questions but to explain their experiences and why they felt the way they did.

While developing the meaning behind what the participants felt promoted academic success while participating in athletics, flexibility allowed the participants to take the lead in the interpretation of their life experiences. Basic questions were used to break the ice and develop trust between the participant and me. However, willingness to follow the story of the participant allowed the direction of the interview to develop and create the foundation of the phenomenon. Englander (2012) stated that the interviewer should not start the interview with traditional questions but instead should allow the participant to describe their experience and the situation or situations that led to the phenomenon.

As the interview process progressed, the same set of questions (Appendix C) was used as a guide and evolved to address the specific phenomenon relayed by the participants. Savenye and Robinson (2005) concluded that there should not be a set of specific questions, but questions should evolve as the interview progresses. It was my responsibility to adapt and change to find deeper meaning in the reflections of the participants and how they related those experiences to the phenomenon. Each interview took place in a secure room and was recorded to ensure accuracy. Documentation of all information relating to academic success, students' drive to be successful while in school, and the experiences through athletic participation did or did not affect their academic success was kept and analyzed.

Analysis

When conducting a qualitative study, data analysis must seamlessly flow between collection, analysis, and reporting of the findings. Creswell and Poth (2017) stated that the process is not set in stone. Instead each iterative step should be inter-related and move from one to another during the whole process of finding meaning in the experience. It was important to ensure accuracy of data collection and constantly review all aspects of the process to eliminate false data and ensure the validity of the results.

The method for analysis was structured around Creswell and Poth's (2018) method of analysis that focuses on using specific stages to derive a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. Since fewer participants are interviewed, a deeper understanding of the phenomenon can be reached (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Flood, 2010). Although their method is detailed, it leaves areas of flexibility that are vital to a strong qualitative study.

At the conclusion of the interview, I transcribed the interview, read the responses as a whole, and reread the complete transcript to get an understanding of the participants' experiences

as a whole. To do this, I recorded the interviews and used a speak-to-write program to change the spoken results into written results. To ensure accuracy, I listened to the interviews of all six participants and corrected any mistakes made by the program.

Once I had a good grasp on the interviews as a whole unit, I read the interviews to start looking for codes that had meaning to the participant and me. As information was shared that I felt may add additional meaning to the overall study, I wrote short memos on a separate sheet of paper. These analytical memos allowed me to place all of my thought on paper to ensure that I did not forget any important aspects of the interviews when looking for emerging ideas (Saldana, 2016). Table 3 shows examples of some of the In Vivo codes I pulled from the interview transcripts. This step started the process of developing coding ideas and led to a deeper understanding and explanation of common themes from participant to participant (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Miles et al., 1994).

Coding was the next crucial step for data analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Coding started with naming the initial codes based on interview responses. I employed the process of In Vivo coding that used the participants' exact words to develop meaningful codes (Saldana, 2016).

TABLE 3*Initial In Vivo Codes*

I wasn't very smart	I loved athletics	Band of brothers
Family	Didn't play a role	Pushing me
Looked up to me	Let them down	Coach was there
No matter what time of year	Grade sheet	Tutoring
Loner	A good leader	Special class
It destroyed me	Bad at English	Student resource time
I wish I could go back	Tall this potential	Focus on school

Note: This is a small sampling of codes used for study. Actual codes are inserted into Tables 5 through 10.

These codes were later placed into groups that had similar meaning. As more and more codes were added, patterns started to develop and categories emerged, giving meaning to what the participants had experienced during their high school years as student-athletes. Appendix D is a replica of the process I used to develop codes and later themes. Descriptions of the students perceived experiences led to descriptions of their lives as student-athletes and how the interactions they had with their family, team, friends and teammates effected their motivation to be successful throughout their high school experiences.

Developing and accessing interpretations based on the information gathered while coding was the fourth step in data analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This process involved relating all the categories and themes in a way that allowed me to learn from the data. This was the first step where I actually started to make connections based on the analysis of the data and decipher what

I had actually learned from the participant's experiences. I related my findings back to what had been discovered in the past and looked for new or unusual findings. Once I had my preliminary thoughts, I developed the three themes used in my results. To assist in ensuring my interpretation was accurate with the experiences of the participants, I conducted member checks which allowed the participants to see my interpretation and give input on its accuracy.

Bradbury-Jones et al. (2010) stated that these member checks add to the validity of the results and develop a truer meaning.

The final step was to determine the best method to display my findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I chose to display the findings in tables that placed the codes in categories within a table which was titled with the subtheme I developed using those codes (Appendix D). This process required me to start back at the beginning and piece together the areas that were pivotal in reaching my conclusion. Once I had found common meaning in the participants' responses, I displayed them in a way that shows how each piece relates to my findings.

Validity

One aspect of qualitative studies focuses on the process of validation and the credibility of the research. Validation for qualitative research focuses on the researcher, the perceived truths behind the data collection and research, and a back and forth negotiation and dialogue with the participants in the study. The interpretations must be open, thought out, and reflected on in a way that allows the information to be reinterpreted by the researcher and others (Angen, 2000). The primary instrument conducting the research was the interviewer. As an administrator who worked with the former administrators of the participants, completing member checks was an important process because it promoted openness between the participants and me.

Personal bias can be a detriment to any phenomenological study. I am the first person in my family to attend college and I attribute my educational success to some very important role models who saw things in me that no one else had. I feel strongly that had I not had these coaches and teammates, I may not be where I am today. Striving to ensure students have someone in their lives who tells them they are special and can accomplish whatever they put in their heart and minds is a goal that pushed me as an educational leader. It was very important to relate the findings to the participants' experiences and place hope that at the conclusion of the study the results can further other people's understanding of what inspires other students with similar situations to have successful and productive lives. My past experiences should not be eliminated because they add value to the meaning developed from the process of the study (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2010).

Oftentimes in qualitative research, the primary source to determine validity is with the researcher. A strong researcher does not place meaning solely on one participant's experience but tries to develop meaning from multiple individuals who convey meaning in similar ways. The inability to find a conclusive result does not in itself mean the study is a failure. Finding that a phenomenon does not exist within a certain group of participants or that the student-athletes' perceptions of their experiences were not similar at all may encourage other researchers to develop new studies to foster change.

Limitations

One common limitation in phenomenological studies is the limiting factors used to determine the participants in the study. I limited the study to only students who were labeled as free and reduced lunch and who displayed the academic patterns that fit the phenomenon I was studying. It is possible that the phenomenon could occur in other individuals who are not

considered low SES, but my study focused on those individuals whose status resembled what I experienced during my time in high school.

Additionally, attending high school in a smaller rural school was another limitation placed on the study. Coming from a small school, I selected school similar in size, population, and location as I attended during my high school career. Larger schools may offer more opportunities for students to participate in athletics, as well as a larger pool to gather more participants, the athletic and academic opportunities provided to the participants mirrored what was available to me during my high school career.

The final limitation I placed on the study was one that was found during the selection process. To truly understand how it felt not to be on a team because of failing to meet the academic requirements, all participants experienced an athletic season when they were not permitted to participate. Often discussed as one of the lowest times in their careers, these consequences caused reactions that varied depending on the individual and their ability to handle adversity.

Summary

Throughout this chapter, the research methods and the approach used to analyze the data using Creswell and Poth's approach, in addition to Saldana's processes of coding and analytical memos, was described. Details were presented about the purpose behind the study and the methods used in conducting the interviews, collecting the data from Casperson High School and Martin High School student-athletes who came from lower SES backgrounds, and analyzing the data through reflection and interpretation. In the next chapter, I present my results.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

This study investigated the phenomena of being a student-athlete who came from low SES backgrounds and their experiences as they related to academic motivation both during the time they participated in high school athletics and when they did not. This chapter starts with a review of the purpose of the study and restates the research questions that guided the study throughout. The results follow in an organized manner, focused on three themes and two subthemes for each theme that were gleaned from hours of interviews with six participants. The chapter concludes with a summary of the themes and key findings as they related to the study and the research questions posed earlier in the dissertation.

Purpose of the Study

Many individuals from low SES backgrounds enter high school performing at or below grade level. Some remain at that level for the four years of high school, while others shift gears and find ways to be successful in the classroom. Researchers have identified these patterns, along with patterns regarding the benefits of participation in extracurricular athletics (Bakoban & Aljarallah, 2015; Broh, 2002; Eccles et al., 2003; Hughes et al., 2016). My research focused on understanding the factors of athletic participation the student-athletes felt best motivated them to be academically successful during the time they participated in a sport. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the experiences student-athletes from low SES backgrounds had while playing school-sponsored athletics to understand what motivating factors led to increased academic performance.

Research Questions

The following three questions were used in my study:

1. What meaning, if any, did student-athletes from low SES backgrounds ascribe to the experience of athletic participation as it related to their academic motivation?
2. What role did athletic participation play in increasing the student-athletes academic motivation?
3. What experiences changed at the conclusion of the athletic season that resulted in student-athletes performing at a lower level academically?

Participant Information

To fully understand the information given by the six participants, it is important to get to know the participants and their athletic and academic backgrounds while they were high school students. Their athletic backgrounds varied as much as dynamics of their family life. All participants experienced difficulties, but were able to fight through adversity to graduate from their perspective high schools.

TABLE 4

Participant Information

	Gender	Graduation Date	Sport(s)	Eligibility	College Athlete
Kenny	Male	2018	Football, Wrestling, Baseball	Varied	No
Carl	Male	2018	Basketball, Baseball	Varied	No
Jeff	Male	2018	Swimming, Track	Varied	No
Rich	Male	2018	Soccer, Baseball	Varied	Yes
Ron	Male	2018	Basketball	Varied	No
Mike	Male	2017	Basketball	Varied	Yes

Note: To protect the identities of the participants, all names are pseudonyms.

Background. All participants were selected based on the criteria given to the committees from each school. The six participants selected for the study were male because the committees were unable to find females who demonstrated the phenomena of grade fluctuation during different seasons of the school year. The students graduated within two years of the start of the study to ensure they could recollect their experiences throughout high school, while experiencing real life events that allowed them to see the importance of a good education after high school.

Additionally, even though it was not part of the selection criteria, all six student-athletes had experienced ineligibility due to grades at some point in their athletic career. All sports listed for the athletes were sports that they played at some point of the high school career. Not all sports were played every year and Ron and Mike were the only athletes who played only one sport their whole career. All participants also qualified for free or reduced meals and book fees at some point during their high school career.

Findings

An analysis of the data gathered during the interviews revealed three themes regarding student's academic and athletic motivation. Participants' academic and athletic motivation were related to their identity, expectations of their role as a student-athlete, and the support they received during their high school careers.

The themes were often different depending on whether the participants were discussing their academic or athletic experiences in the high school setting. Subthemes were then developed that focused on all three themes as they related to both academics and athletics. The

categories for each theme manifested through details which explained their identity, expectations and, support as they interacted with different individuals during their high school career.

Participants' Academic Identity. Often referring to themselves as weak students, all six participants described themselves as individuals who did not always put forth the effort needed to be successful in the classroom. Their academic identity was known to others who often provided help to ensure they were capable of remaining on the team during the athletic season. While some participants described classes that they were strong in, none described academics as an area of strength and often stated that school was just not for them.

TABLE 5*Academic Identity as Perceived by the Participants*

	Ability	Effort	Role	Social
Kenny	I wasn't very smart.	I didn't use my time very well. I never took advantage of the programs at school.	I just didn't want to be there.	I primarily had more people looking out for me during the sports season.
Carl	I was really bad in English with reading and typing.	I had to keep my grades up so I could do what I wanted to do.	Make sure you do your work and do what you are supposed to every day.	My friends and family didn't care as much once the season was over.
Jeff	I did pretty well when I tried and even the grades reflected it most of the time.	My reason to be in school was not necessarily academics. I didn't always pay attention.	I tended to do better when I was in with a group of friends who pushed me to try harder.	I always wanted to be a part of the group.
Rich	I struggled because school was just not my thing.	I just wish I would've taken better advantage of it.	I wasn't dreading going to class. I was just lazy or something.	My friends were not very good motivators.
Ron	I didn't do well in class.	I didn't try that much because I knew I was not good in it.	I had fun being in school. I just didn't have as much fun going to classes.	They were all really focused and their parents were involved in their schooling. That is where I fell off.
Mike	Being a student at CHS was very difficult for me.	The more interested I was, the harder I tried.	You have to get your grades to play a sport. I had to show the lower class how	Most of my friends were honor roll students and that

to do it.

motivated me.

Ability. All six participants identified themselves as individuals who struggled academically. Throughout the interview the six participants discussed how much they struggled with academics and all six felt like they were not strong in a variety of subjects and activities required by teachers. Rich described this saying,

I liked my classes a lot, but I knew I struggled in school because it was just not my thing.

I knew there were opportunities to fix that, but I didn't. I didn't have anything I was dreading about going to class, but I guess it was just a thing I had myself.

A common theme among all but two participants was that they seemed to have difficulty in English and courses that required a lot of writing. Carl and Ron stated that they were not good at writing and understanding all that went with the specific parts of grammar that needed to be used at different times. Ultimately, there was not a common class or activity they struggled most in and the classes they were successful in varied among participants. The participants lacked confidence in their academic abilities and it often showed in a lack of motivation in the classroom.

Effort. Additionally, all participants also discussed their lack of effort resulting in their struggles and expressed their desire to go back in time and tell themselves that the focus should have been on their education above all else. The six participants stated that their efforts were greater when they were participating in athletics. However, some of them admitted that they did not always give their best efforts because they either knew that they were not good at the subject, or that they had obtained the grades they needed to continue participating in athletics. Mike

explained that his effort increased during athletics because it was his responsibility to show the younger players how they should act in the classroom as well as on the court. While each had reasons to increase efforts at these times, they all said they often thought about what their life would be like if they had given their full effort from the first day of high school. Kenny stated,

Don't worry more about athletics than your academics. Athletics would just get you through high school. Academics can take care of you for the rest of your life. I would tell myself to focus more on academics than on athletics because that is going to be your future.

All participants echoed this sentiment when asked what advice they would give themselves as freshman coming into high school. Life experiences had changed their future plans and they realized things do not always go as planned. It was then that they felt they had a better understanding of why they were always told how important their education was to their future.

Role. Each participant had a unique take on their role in the school and classroom. All discussed how it was not that they hated school or dreaded being in school, it was just that they tended to be lazy and not do their part while in class. They discussed how they preferred doing hands-on activities with groups and that when other people counted on them to do their part, they would step up and complete it because they did not want to let the others down or cause them to receive a bad grade. All but Ron enjoyed being in school and going to many of their classes. They did not enjoy doing the homework and going to some of the harder classes that were more of a lecture style where they took notes and were given different types of assessments that they typically failed.

Social. Throughout the interviews, the participants discussed how their friends were often smarter than them and that even their families understood that school just was not their thing. The participants all talked about the social aspects of school being very important to them and that the realization that academics should have taken priority did not occur to them until they had finished high school and realized that their dreams had to change along with their perspectives on life after school. According to the participants, the support they received from the school, their friends, and family members varied depending on whether they were in season or after the athletic season had ended. Varying social groups had an effect on this as many of the participants' teammates would push them to keep their grades up to retain their athletic eligibility. New social groups would sometimes replace teammates at the conclusion of the season and their perspectives on grades were sometimes different than that of their teammates and coaches. None of the participants portrayed that anyone else was responsible for their academic struggles. The results of their academic struggles were theirs and theirs alone. Jeff concluded,

My reason to be in school was not necessarily academically which I could be later outside of school, but I love entertaining people. That was a big factor and I loved being the center of attention. When I was in school, I wanted to be a part of the group. I was always in class, but I didn't always pay attention when I should have.

Overall Perception of the Participant's Academic Identity. Although each participant was able to identify classes that they were strong in and often had little difficulty being successful during their time in high school, their overall perception was that they were not strong academically. They believed they could have put more effort into their learning and their role as a student. However, it is important to note that even with that perception, these individuals were

academically more successful during the athletic season despite their attitudes toward school and how they felt about themselves when it came to the academic aspect of high school.

Participants' Athletic Identity. Widely praised for their athletic talents, participants described a confidence in athletics that led to increased effort and a significant role on the team. All participants felt that their teams were stronger with them in the line-up and if they were not playing, they were letting their teammates down.

TABLE 6*Athletic Identity as Perceived by the Participants*

	Ability	Effort	Role	Social
Kenny	I am an athletic kid.	I always gave my best.	I was the hype beast and I get everyone going.	We were a family. A band of brothers.
Carl	I could definitely be in college playing somewhere.	I worked hard every day at practice.	I would guard their best player. I communicated with everyone and told them what to do.	Sometimes people that weren't talking to most people in the school, but if you are an athlete, they would talk to you.
Jeff	I was an athlete, but being a leader was more important.	I was pressured to do better and that always helped me to perform my best.	The sports helped me learn how to be a leader.	Sometimes we goof off as kids do, but overall it was great being with my friends.
Rich	I loved being an athlete. I was the only one who went on to play college soccer.	I was in the gym every morning at 4 a.m. and I didn't have anyone that had that type of motivation.	I was good at motivating people. They looked up to me and I felt like I was a big part of the team.	We need you. They could have won and I could have been a part of that.
Ron	I was kind of a star athlete.	I could not give up during the whole 32 minutes.	I had a big role on the team and outside of me nobody else rebounded or tried to get the ball.	We would get mad at each other, but after practice was over we forgot about it and loved each other.
Mike	I would put out a lot of energy and	I would do what I needed to do in	I led the underclassmen to	Leading the underclassmen

intensity and the others would feed off of me.	order to achieve.	make better decisions.	made me feel like a better leader and a greater person.
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Ability. The answers provided by the participants in regards to their athletic identity were in sharp contrast to those given in relation to their academic identity. All six participants felt that their ability as an athlete far exceeded their ability as a student. Comments ranged from being a star athlete to loving everything about sports. Their desire to do well in sports and belief that their skills were beneficial to the team and their teammates exceeded any doubts that they may have had regarding whether they could help their team be successful when they were participating. Jeff added,

Seniors were always looked at to be the leaders. They could show others what to do or tell them what to do. Coach always discussed leading by example, so that put more pressure on us to do what was right. I was an athlete, but being a leader was more important.

Effort. Another unique piece of the participants' identities was the willingness to put forth the effort needed to become better in the sport they chose to play. The participants discussed that even though they did not like practices, drills, or being yelled at by their coaches, they felt that they always gave the effort needed to be successful in the pool, on the court, or on the field of play. The participants believed that this attitude not only pushed them to be better athletes, but caused their teammates to emulate their work ethic and also became better athletes. Additionally, five of the six participants discussed having the ability to play at the college level, with Rich and Mike actually competing in athletics while in college.

Role. During the process of writing analytical memos, I noticed a key theme that is presented in Table 6. Each participant started talking about their role on their perspective teams and how their performance affected the team and their teammates. It was also during this time that I started to notice the participants talking about the team as their family and used terms of endearment such as love. All of the participants felt that they had an important role on the team and that if they did not perform at a certain level, they would let their teammates down. They viewed themselves as leaders and had to display actions that demonstrated the way one should act when others are watching and learning from them. Ron described his role on the team stating,

I had a big role on the team and outside of me, there was really nobody else rebounding or trying to get the ball. If they lost me, that is a big part of the team, so I really had to focus on school.

Social. While interviewing the six participants, I began to notice that their relationships with their teammates and their role on the team became their greatest motivator. Whether the participants had a relationship with their teammates outside of the sport, or if they even liked the other people on the team in any other situation off of the field, when they were playing, they were a team and counted on each other. Some participants felt that they have lifelong friendships because of sports, while others felt that their teammates needed them to reach their potential and help them only during their time on the field. The social aspect of athletics allowed the participants to be leaders and influence others to be better than they were before. They spoke of love, family, and leadership that developed bonds that brought the most out of themselves and the rest of the team. Kenny stated,

The experiences as an athlete were that we were just one big family. I loved playing every sport I played. Football was a very big sport for me because we got a new coach. He just brought everyone together and actually changed the whole chemistry of the school. Not just the athletes, but we were all just a big band of brothers.

Overall Perceptions of the Participant's Athletic Identity. Unlike their academic identity, the student-athletes had very positive recollections of their identity as an athlete. Throughout the interviews, the tone and overall demeanor of the participants changed when they were talking about their high school experiences as athletes. They talked about the success of their teams and how they helped the team perform at a level that was above where they would without their participation. Additionally, there was a sense of responsibility that went beyond the individual and encompassed the true meaning of a team. They belonged on the team and their presence and abilities took the team to places they may not have reached without their contributions as athletes.

Academic Expectations of Participants. Living up to the academic expectations of those around them, the participants felt as though the school staff and their coaches were the only individuals who placed importance on the overall academic success of the participants. Participants viewed academics as a means to an end that rarely described graduation as a goal, but instead placed focus on athletic participation. Hints of similarities about the group work did exist when discussed, but not at a level that pushed the participants to put effort into their academics ensuring a consistent level of academic success throughout the school year.

TABLE 7*Academic Expectations as Perceived by the Participants*

	Self-Centered	Other-Centered	School	Family
Kenny	When we worked in groups, I knew I had to do my part.	Kids (teammates) looked up to me and I could not let them down.	I knew I had to work hard to play the next season.	As long as I played sports, we were good.
Carl	You have to keep your grades up in the classroom; that was the first thing.	I wanted to be as good as I could be and not fail my teammates and coaches.	If I didn't bring my grades up, I would not be allowed to play.	I could only have one F or they would keep me out of sports.
Jeff	It was the first priority. We went through the week knowing academic over sports.	If you love your team and your teammates, you will do all you can to stay on the team and help them out.	If I wasn't doing my part, the assistant principal would have me in his office to see what was happening.	There was always pressure to do well in school. They would want me to do well.
Rich	Science and math didn't catch my interest, so I was not in the mood to do that.	I felt bad because I didn't want him to start like that as a new coach.	I felt like coming to school was a lot more about doing school work than just playing sports.	When I was young, they pushed me until I hated school. Later, they only cared when I cared.
Ron	I knew if I wanted to play basketball in college, I had to excel in school.	If they lost me, that is a big part of the team. They really had me focused on school.	I needed to have good grades and do my work.	My mom never checked my grades. She had to work all the time.
Mike	I had to motivate myself. If I	Without me, the team was going	The school helped a lot,	My family didn't motivate me in

didn't do well I	to struggle. I had	especially	academics.
wouldn't feel	to keep my	coming from a	
good about	grades up.	school that wants	
myself.		you to achieve a	
		lot.	

Self-centered. All participants described the details of the academic expectations they placed on themselves throughout high school. Their answers to the interview questions described the need to pass the number of classes required to remain eligible for athletics, but rarely did the answers discuss the need to obtain credits to qualify for graduation. They were aware that they needed to pass a certain number of classes to be eligible for sports and that they needed a certain number of credits to get their high school diplomas, but only one of those seemed to create the motivation needed for them to put more effort into their studies. Athletics seemed to be a possible ticket for them to move forward after high school and obtain an education while playing college level athletics. Five of the six participants had the dream of playing college sports, but did not feel that they put forth the extra efforts in the classroom to ensure they would be able to be successful academically in an environment of higher learning.

Other-centered. The participants added to the earlier discussion that their level of effort would increase when others were involved. Most preferred group work in the classroom because they could count on the others to hold them accountable to get their part done. Again, the overarching perspective was that they did not want to let anyone down who was counting on them to be successful as a group. Jeff felt, "If you love your team and your teammates, you will do all you can to stay on the team and help them out." This echoed in their beliefs that if they did not perform well in the class they would not be performing at all on the field. Little was expressed about not playing the sport, but instead the discussion revolved around letting their

teammates down and not being as good during that particular season if they were not a playing. Ron stated, “Yes, I pushed for myself and my parents obviously, because they wanted me to play well. I pushed myself mostly because I wanted to be as good as I could be and not fail my teammates and coaches.”

School. One area that seemed to be present throughout the interviews was that the coaches, teachers, administrators, and student-athletes were aware of the qualification needed for student-athletes to remain eligible to play sports. Although this was a common discussion with all involved, the school placed an even greater emphasis on graduation. Upon reflecting on their current life status, all of the participants stated that they wished they would have listened to the adults in the school and placed more focus on their academic careers. Mike added,

It has helped a lot, especially coming from a school that wants you to achieve a lot.

They give out a lot of knowledge so you can transfer it on to you go next. I transferred it to college and that knowledge made it much easier.

All participants felt supported in athletics, but were also aware that the school expected more from them as students, not as athletes.

Family. The participants’ perceptions of their family’s academic expectations were similar in many ways. While most knew that their parents expected them to do well in school, they felt that this was only the case when it involved their athletic eligibility. Ron claimed that his mom never checked his grades and Mike said that his family had nothing to do with him throughout his high school career. Communication between the family and the participants in regards to academics was only common with Jeff, who was being raised by his grandparents. He stated that his grandparents required him to do his homework as soon as he arrived home, but

rarely made contact with the school or checked his grades to know exactly how he was doing between report cards. When communication existed, it seemed to be more negative in nature and included the parents being upset with the participants and their possible loss of athletic eligibility.

Overall Perception of the Participant's Academic Expectations. Although one might think that students focus on education as a path to graduation, that aspect of academics was rarely discussed during any of the six interviews. Academic expectations always found a way back to the field of play. Despite the fact that all of the participants graduated from high school, each found themselves watching their teammates play without them due to their being ineligible for a sport because of grades. With that fact being known, the focus once again found its way back to others and performing at a level that would not let anyone down or hurt their chances of success in any way. They wanted to be an example for others and their ultimate goal was to do whatever it took to ensure they would be on the field with their teammates and coaches.

Athletic Expectations of Participants. To elaborate on the athletic expectations placed on the participants, all but Mike described a time when athletics was a big part of their family's life and they were expected to be on the field when the next game started. The pressure to succeed on the field was far greater than that of being successful in the classroom. Participants viewed athletics as their way to be a part of something that was bigger than themselves. Letting their team down was not an option and often a reason to work harder to be academically successful allowing them to continue to participate in their sport.

TABLE 8*Athletic Expectations as Perceived by the Participants*

	Self-Centered	Other-Centered	School	Family
Kenny	You don't give up, can't give up, it is not an option.	They are always there for you and you are always there for them.	I needed to get my grades up to be eligible.	They were always pushing me to be better in sports.
Carl	I worked hard every day so I could stay on the team and help them out.	Working as a team that was all that really mattered.	Everybody with the school wanted to see everybody do good in athletics. If I didn't get my grade up, I could not play.	They wanted me to go to college to play basketball.
Jeff	If you didn't do your part, you hurt the team.	I realize team is first and I was second. I thought if I didn't do my part the team would suffer. I worked hard for them.	I was pressured to do better and that always helped me to perform my best.	We engaged in conditioning and practiced outside of the season.
Rich	I am cocky on my own especially when I think of my own personal needs.	I'll take the blame because it is on me. You can't replace playing with your friends.	I am sure there are places out there where the athletes get the special treatment, but not here.	They pushed me and made me the player I am today. My brother was a teammate and we got better together.
Ron	Senior year was when I started showing out and breaking	I was trying to guide them to the right direction so they would be in	When I was doing things I wasn't supposed to do, they	My family always told me I needed to go to the basket

	records.	good hands next year.	would let me know.	because nobody could even come close to stopping me.
Mike	Be a good leader and get my work done in the classroom and on the court.	Lead the underclassmen and help them make better decisions.	Nothing other than keeping my grades up.	My parents didn't come to my games.

Self-centered. We see a drastic change in the perceptions between the academic expectations and the athletic expectations placed on the student-athletes. All six participants discussed the higher level of expectations that not only did they place on themselves but that others placed on them as well. The expectations they placed on themselves incorporated their performance on the field and the effort they had to put in to be better. All six participants discussed how being an athlete placed them at a different level within the school and how that expectation followed them into the classroom. They felt the school became a place where they were known and with that recognition came a new set of standards that they were expected to live up to both on the court and in the classroom. Mike went into detail explaining that if the younger kids on his team saw him not putting in the effort in the classroom, he would be the leader they needed. He insisted that his efforts had to be evident both on and off the court.

Other-centered. Placing others before themselves was present again as the participants discussed the athletic expectations that are linked to the other individuals who are affected by their actions. All six participants discussed how they each had a role on the team and that they expected a lot of themselves as it related to their performance on the field. The discussed how that even though the feeling they had when they were successful in athletics and reached a level

beyond what they felt they could reach was unlike anything in the world, the feeling was only matched when their team experienced similar success. As they reflected on their experiences, they expected more out of themselves and would do whatever it took to ensure that they were not the reason that their team did not reach their potential. Mike explained that if he had high expectations of himself, his teammates would mimic his behavior and be a leader for the team once he left. Leaving the team in good hands and developing the younger players into strong individuals and team players, was important to all six participants. Kenny described this in a situation he experienced recalling,

We came back in the fourth quarter and won, which we were supposed to lose. I learned that you always have your brother to help you out. They are always there for you and you are always there for them. That was a really big one.

School. Although the athletic programs that the six participants participate in were offered through the school, the participants perceived the expectations of the school focused solely on the academic success and the sportsmanship they demonstrated by making the decisions that keep them on the field. The participants discussed ways the teachers made the connection between academic and athletic success and stated that to be successful in life, there needs to be a connection between the two different pieces. All participants talked about school personnel who built them up and never lowered their expectations in the classroom. Ron felt that he was given opportunities to make work up by some teachers, but did not feel he was given a grade that he did not deserve. He stated they helped him because “they knew I needed help.” Their experiences with staff and administrations always had the school focused on academics with athletics as an opportunity for them to be a part of the school outside of the classroom.

Family. Throughout the interviews, it became evident that the families were much more involved in the athletic lives in all but Mike's. Many of the parents pushed the students to do better in athletics and worked with them to better their game whether through practicing with them or providing them with an opportunity to play athletics beyond the organized school-based athletic programs. Jeff and Rich discussed family members being on the same team and training with them to get better. Five of the six discussed family members who attended the games and tournaments, dispensing advice and cheering them on through the successes they experienced on the field.

Overall Perception of the Participant's Athletic Expectations. Although the interviews discussed the increased expectation placed on all of the participants, there was a sense that their athletic expectations were at a higher level and shared among all groups. With that being said, I once again noticed that there was a belief that if they met the expectations, the team would benefit much more than they would as an individual. The expectations were higher, but they were willing to put the effort in to reaching those expectations if they benefited the team and led to success that went beyond what was expected of them and of their team.

Academic Support for Participants. Commonly offered in the school, all participants described academic support offered by individuals or groups throughout the school year. However, all six participants described situations where they were provided with academic support and did not take advantage of the help that was available both in and out of the classroom. The frequency of assistance varied with more assistance being offered during the season or as the athletic season approached.

TABLE 9*Academic Support as Perceived by the Participants*

	Coach	Teammates	Family	Friends	School
Kenny	Even in the off season, he always talked to me about my grades, (A)	It was the football team captain. I would go out of my way to ask him if he could help me. (A)	They did not play a very big role at all. (N)	I had friends there to help me out along the way. (A)	At CHS, we were one big family. Every morning my teacher would call me in and ask me about my grades. (A)
Carl	My basketball coach would help me every day after school. Even not during the season, he would help me. (A)	We would ask each other if we needed help and we would stay after school for help. (S)	My sister and my brother would help me to keep my grades up. (S)	We would look out for each other. (S)	Most of the teachers would help you whether that be in class or after. (A)
Jeff	My coaches were counting on me and they would do anything to make sure I was doing good in my classes. (S)	We would discuss some of our assignments and talk about what we needed to do to finish them. (S)	At any time when I needed on a situation whether it was materials support with a project or homework, they were always there to back me	We would get together after school and we would do some homework. (A)	The teachers and staff put in more effort than I did to make me succeed. (A)

			up. (A)		
Rich	My coaches were the greatest motivators. (S)	They were big motivating me after I was eligible. (S)	They really didn't motivate me a lot. (N)	I would say my friends were not great motivators. My girlfriend was my tutor. (A)	If I didn't make the grades, I would not be eligible for sports. (S)
Ron	Definitely all the coaches were my motivators in school. (S)	They knew that school was what it is all about and that basketball is just an activity. (S)	They did not help at all. (N)	During my senior year, they helped me with my senior exit project. They pushed me to get it finished. (A)	Every teacher would stay after school every day to help. (A)
Mike	The coaches would check my grades and make sure I was doing what I needed to do. (S)	We couldn't be a family if we didn't keep our grades up. (S)	They did not play a big role at all. (N)	They would ask me to be a part of their group because they knew I struggled. (A)	My SRL teachers always helped me. That helped out tremendously. (A)

Note. The above codes were a result of interviews conducted with all participants with questions listed on Appendix C. The following subcategories were used to determine the frequency of support as perceived by the participant: S- Seasonal, A-All Year, N- Never.

Coach. Analytical memos taken after the first two interviews described a common theme between the two student-athletes. When interviewing Kenny and Carl, I noticed that both stated that their coach had supported them throughout the year and was always there if they needed additional help. They continued discussing how the coach would approach them throughout the year and talk about their grades and tell them they had to keep them up in order to play. I noted

this in my analytical memos after both interviews and stated that this was an unexpected outcome and an area I should pay close attention to while interviewing the final four participants. Throughout the interview of Jeff, I listened for the connection between coach and player, but it did not surface. The remaining three participants also talked about other individuals who helped them throughout the year, but not the coaches. Their perceptions were that the coaches would help during the season, but once they were finished playing, their coaches would pretty much disappear.

Teammates. Five of the six participants described instances where their teammates helped them academically. The support manifested in students helping them with their homework, pushing them to complete an assignment, or just including them in their group for a group project. Rich described himself as a loner and stated that his teammates gave him little academic support and that their relationships often ended on the field. However, he continued stating that when he was eligible, they motivated him to work harder in class and be a part of the team's success. Most felt that even though the teammates were there for support, it often came and went with the athletic seasons.

Family. Family members were perceived to provide the least amount of academic support of all. Carl acknowledged support from a family member other than providing them with the supplies they needed for school. "My sister and my brother would help me keep my grades up." Four of the remaining five participants felt that their family did not offer any type of support when it came to their academics. Five of the six continued stating that their families were proud of them when they graduated, but that reaching that point was a reflection of their effort and not of the academic support they received from their families.

Friends. The participants stated that often times their teammates were their friends and that once the season was over, things pretty much stayed the same. The friends would push them when their academics determined if they could play sports, but when that was not in the equation, they did little to push them to be successful in the classroom. New groups of friends would sometimes replace teammates at the completion of the season. When those individuals were not part of a team, they seemed to focus less on academics when they would hang out. There were times when they would do projects together or help each other with problems, but rarely were they motivating factors for academic success. Only one time was a friend recognized as being a major support for a participant. Rich stated his girlfriend tutored him throughout his senior year and without her he would not have graduated.

School. All six participants stated that the individuals from the school were there for academic support. Five of the six continued by giving examples of help they could receive at any time throughout the year and two participants stated that without this help, they may not have graduated. This support systems ranged from after school tutoring, to assistance offered to all students during certain classes during the day, and culminated with specific teachers who went out of their way to provide the participants with someone they can go to for one on one assistance. Each gave specific ways they could get help, but also admitted that they rarely took full advantage of these opportunities.

Overall Perception of the Participant's Academic Support. Continuing to dig into the data, I noticed that every participant had someone, whether it was their coach, family, friends, or a teacher, who was there for academic support throughout the year. All of this support pushed students to do better academically and keep their grades up to a minimum required to participate in a sport, but the participants only seemed to take full advantage of their support networks

during the season while they needed the grades to participate. Often, after the eligibility checks had taken place, their grades would drop sharply, sometimes as soon as the next day. The same help was offered, and the coaches would check grades, but many of the participants were just not as motivated to work in the classroom.

All participants acknowledged that academic support, in one form or another, was available to them throughout the school year. All participants felt that once the season was over, they did not try as hard and lost interest in academics. Knowing full well that they needed the credits and grades to graduate, their effort decreased and their grades fell below the level they had achieved while participating in athletics. My attention returned again to the discussions referring to their teammates and how if they did not make the grades, it would affect the team. The participants did not want to let their teammates down and when their grades determined whether or not they could play with the team, they achieved academically at a level higher level than when their grades did not determine eligibility.

Athletic Support for Participants. Mirroring the confidence the athletes felt about their ability, all participants described a desire to be the best athlete they could throughout their career. The consensus between all athletes was that if they listened to those were there for them and gave their best effort, they would contribute to the success of the team. Athletic support was offered throughout the school year and an option that all participants gladly took advantage of without hesitation.

TABLE 10*Athletic Support as Perceived by the Participants*

	Coach	Teammates	Family	Friends	School
Kenny	He motivated me to go out and be a better person and always bring my best. (A) A lot of times I would not see the coaches after the season. (S)	The team was always there for me. We were a band of brothers. (A)	My mom did teach me how to play baseball. They love seeing me on the field. (S)	He was always telling me I could go somewhere and play. (A)	They always pushed me to be a better athlete, especially in the weight room. (A)
Carl	Once basketball was over, he continued to push me. (A)	Teammates would always help. They would not push you as much after the season was over. (S)	They would show up to my games whenever they could. Not just my immediate family, but my extended family. (S)	My friends wouldn't really push you that hard after the season. (S)	The teachers didn't push you as hard in the classroom. (S)
Jeff	Coach always discussed leading by example. That put pressure on us to do what was right. (S)	My coaches and teammates were always there when I needed them. (S)	They always knew me best and knew how to talk to me to figure out what the problem was and how to address it. (A)	We often talked together during practice and how we were doing reaching our goals. I did not want to let them down. (A)	They were always there to make sure you are safe. They would organize everything and give us procedures to follow. (A)

Rich	They were a big part of everything. When the season was over, I did not hear from them. (S)	The whole team did a really good job of helping me be successful. (S)	My brother and I practice with each other. We pushed each other and we got better together. (A)	In season they are your best friends and out of season you won't hear from them at all. (S)	They supported me a little. (N)
Ron	They would help me out so I could help other do what was right. (S)	They were always there for me. When I was getting yelled at, they were always there to pick me up. (S)	My family and my brothers were all big on basketball. They made me want to make them proud. (S)	They were always there for me. (S)	I feel like I was doing better because they were all standing behind me. (S)
Mike	The coaches would motivate me and teach me how to do it right. (S)	When I made a good play, the team would make me feel good about myself. (S)	None of my family members really came to my games. (N)	If I had a bad game, they would tell me I could do better. (S)	They would help me out as much as they could. (S)

Note. The above codes were a result of interviews conducted with all participants with questions listed on Appendix C. The following subcategories were used to determine the frequency of support as perceived by the participant: S- Seasonal, A-All Year, N- Never.

Coach. The data shows that the greatest strength of coaches was motivating the participants to push themselves to be better athletes. All six participants described instances where their coaches used various techniques to push them beyond their perceived limits. The motivation was sometimes yelling or making them run, but they always said that once they were down, their coaches would build them up to levels higher than they thought they could go. Kenny stated, “He motivated me to go out and be a better person and always bring my best.”

Kenny and Carl recalled that the support lasted the whole school year, but the others claimed it ended at the conclusion of the season.

Teammates. The motivation the participants associated with their teammates seemed to be one of the stronger types of motivation. When speaking of teammates, the participants used words like family, love, and brothers. They discussed the support they gave each other on the field and how they pushed each other through competition forcing them to get better each day. For Jeff and Rich, family was combined with teammates as they played with cousins and a brother. They felt that this added a new level of motivation. Throughout the interviews, the questions led to statements about teammates always being there for support whenever they needed it. However, all participants felt that the support from their teammates often came and went with the season.

Family. The greatest contrast in support involved the support of their family members. Five of the six participants shared stories of their family playing sports together and providing support during the athletic season. The parents worked with them throughout their lives by throwing the ball together or shooting hoops after school. Kenny discussed how his parents understood him as an athlete and could help him during the toughest times when he was playing sports. All but Mike discussed connections they made with family members and how their family never missed a game and always rooted them on from the sidelines. Mike stated his family was not supportive claiming, “None of my family members really came to my games.”

Friends. Similar to the support given for academics, the participants stated that their friends did not offer a lot of athletic support. They often cheered them on from the sideline and congratulated them after a win, but often they were just there during the offseason to play a pick-up game at the park. Friends provided support when the outcome was not perfect and when they

felt that they felt that they were not good enough. Friends were there for psychological support when they needed them and they provided the support to keep pushing on beyond the tough times.

School. As the interview reached its conclusion, the question about school support and athletics seemed to be one of the more difficult for Rich. The other participants were able to discuss ways that the school supported them academically, but struggled to give instances of athletic support. Instances of providing safe fields and equipment came up, but the support in school came more from confidence resulting from the opportunity to play a sport they were good at and achieve a level of success that they might not see in a classroom.

Overall Perception of the Participant's Athletic Support. Although all participants felt like there was support for them to perform better athletically, there was a greater number who felt that this came and went with the season. Parents, students, and coaches were there for them more often during the athletic season and gave a higher level of support than they ever showed when it came to their academic performance. All but Jeff felt that as long as they were on the team and playing, their parents didn't care as much about their grades as of their performance on the field of play. Two even discussed this to the point of showing frustration and disappointment.

Table 10 shows that the participants felt a wide range of support, but that a majority of this support was only seasonal. When they were playing sports, they felt pushed by more people to be successful on the court or in the pool. Family members were more present for five of the participants, and two of the participants, Rich and Ron, stated they wished their parents had pushed them as hard in the classroom as they had on the basketball court. Coaches were much harder on the participants when it involved their athletic performance and were there for them

when they did not play as well as expected. For Kenny and Ron, athletic events were the only times they really saw their families. They stated that this was not because their family didn't care, but that their parents had to work to provide for them. For families from low SES backgrounds, this is a part of life that often seems unfair, but is a fact of life. Feeding children and providing for the family far outweighs the need to watch a game. Unfortunately, it is hard for the high school student-athlete to understand the difference.

Summary

The themes developed in this chapter demonstrated the phenomena of being a high school athlete for the six participants selected for this study. All participants agreed that their academic success varied depending on whether they were participating in athletics or out of season. Although there were many similarities in why they felt this phenomenon was taking place, they all felt that when they were participating in sports they were a part of something that was bigger than them. Their actions affected the team and they would do whatever it took to ensure that they would not let their teammates down. Being considered low SES seemed to affect these individuals more when it came to the support given at home. Most of the participants recalled very little academic support from home and expressed the desire that their parents had been more involved in the academic side of their high school career. They understood that their parents were often working in order to support them, but they wished that the level of academic support could have equaled that of the athletic support received.

The multitude of codes that I used to create the themes was as varied as the individuals I interviewed. Although the participants all had the ability and support network to be academically successful throughout the whole school year, with these six individuals, that was not the case. As they reflected on their high school career, they wished that they could go back

and put as much effort in to their academics as they had when playing athletics. However, in all six cases, the participants took their role on the team seriously. When their actions affected their team, they did what needed to be done to ensure they did not let their teammates down. In chapter five, I use the results discerned from the interviews to provide ways that this information might be implemented in programs within schools in promote academic success, discuss how the results relate to the review of literature, and recommend thoughts for future results.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

This phenomenological study focused on the experience of six participants who demonstrated a fluctuation in academic performance while participating in athletics or when the season concluded. Chapter 5 gives a summary of the study and reviews the problem, research questions, and the study's purpose. In the chapter, I review the methodology used in the study and recap the major findings. I relate my findings to the information contained in the review of literature, discuss how the themes that emerged from the participant interviews relates to other findings, and discuss how these findings may help educators create opportunities for students to participate in school activities that promote academic success. Finally, I offer recommendations for future research and give my concluding remarks.

Statement of the Problem

When seeking understanding as to what motivates students the difficulty is relating it to the wide variety of personalities, backgrounds, skills, and other factors that affect each individual. The problem is finding the common thread between students who come from low SES backgrounds and identifying factors stimulate their motivation to be academically successful. Most students, including those from low SES families, choose whether to put in the effort needed to be successful or to perform at a level below their true ability. Educators are left to decide whether they can help increase student motivation that will allow students to grow personally and be academically successful in school. My study examined the experiences of six individuals and led to the development of themes that may help guide educators to finding a starting point for change to motivate the student-athletes in the classroom.

Purpose of the Study

Many individuals from low SES backgrounds enter high school performing at or below grade level. Some remain at that level for the four years of high school, while others shift gears and find ways to be successful in the classroom. Researchers have identified these patterns, along with patterns regarding the benefits of participation in extracurricular athletics (Bakoban & Aljarallah, 2015; Broh, 2002; Eccles et al., 2003; Hughes et al., 2016). My research focused on understanding the factors of athletic participation the student-athletes felt best motivated them to be academically successful during the time they participated in a sport. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the experiences student-athletes from low SES backgrounds had while playing school-sponsored athletics in order to understand how those experiences were related to increased academic motivation to be successful in the classroom while participating in sports and ended at the conclusion of the season.

Relationship to the Conceptual Framework

Relating the participants' experiences to the self-determination theory (SDT) required me to go back to all of the responses and assess whether the participants were motivated through autonomous, controlled, and impersonal motivation. Throughout my review, I also searched for the concept of life goals and how the participants related their experiences to those things they hope to accomplish in their life.

Autonomous Motivation. Although all three types of motivation exist in every person, some were more prevalent in my study than others (Bartholomew et al., 2011; Deci & Ryan, 2008; Ratelle et al., 2007). When analyzing the autonomous motivation for the participants, I focused on their desire to be the all-star player, the desire to win championships, and their

academic success measured by graduation from high school. Interview after interview, I listened to the recordings of the participants and attempted to find areas where their lack of effort and success outside the season caused them to work harder. I heard references to it when I asked the participants what they would say if they were able to go back in time and offer advice to themselves as freshmen. They stated they would tell their younger selves to focus more on academics and put more effort into their studies because those will take them further than athletics.

All six participants stated if they had worked harder in the classroom, they would be doing something different with their lives today. However, when I was asking them questions about their experiences in high school, both academically and athletically, they did not refer to times when they worried about graduating or not winning all conference. The responses related to one's positive mental health revolved around the success of the team and how they felt when they were able to contribute to the team's success (Deci & Ryan, 2008). As the team developed and became better, the participants were able to relate their personal growth to the success and stated the feeling of doing better than others felt they could, was the greatest feeling in the world.

Controlled Motivation. Controlled motivation was evident in all six participant interviews. They discussed the consequences related to athletics and whether their coaches or administrators used punishments to motivate them to do better in the classroom (Bartholomew et al., 2011; Deci & Ryan, 2008; Ratelle et al., 2007). All discussed running or doing extra drills until they brought their grades up. Additionally, three of the participants discussed the requirement of attending study tables after school if their grades were below a predetermined level. This method of motivation seemed to cause the participants to work harder in the classroom and seek help as needed.

Unfortunately other forms of controlled motivation were not as effective. All of the participants were aware of the grade requirements needed to participate in athletics. Throughout their athletic careers, all six were ineligible for athletics because of academic requirements. When discussing these times, they were more upset because it affected the team rather than affecting their ability to participate in the sport. Each participant loved athletics and enjoyed participating, but ultimately focused more on the success and needs of the team over their own success.

Impersonal motivation. Impersonal motivation describes the type of motivation where individual beats themselves up and cause instances of self-derogation (Deci & Ryan, 2008). None of the participants described times when they hated themselves or thought less of themselves. If they were removed from the team, they didn't discuss any instances where they cost themselves the chance to get any awards or recognition. Instead, they discussed how they felt when they had to talk to their teammates or watch the team lose a close game. One student described it when he stated, not playing "really destroyed him."

Throughout each interview, the participants discussed pushing their teammates and building each other up through the tough practices and close games. They continued discussing how the team's success meant more to them and caused them to be closer to their teammates. They all felt the teammates developed into a family and worked hard to make sure that they were always there for each other. (Eccles et al., 2003). All in all, the six participants discussed areas where all three types of motivation resulted in greater effort in the classroom. Some motivation was more effective, but all had a part in the success of the students and ultimately led to their opportunity to graduate from high school.

Research Questions

The following three questions were be used to focus the study:

1. What meaning, if any, did student-athletes from low SES backgrounds ascribe to the experience of athletic participation as it related to their academic motivation?
2. What role did athletic participation play in increasing the student-athletes academic motivation?
3. What experiences changed at the conclusion of the athletic season that resulted in student-athletes performing at a lower level academically?

Major Findings and Their Link to the Literature

The previous literature regarding athletics and academic success often focused on quantitative data that typically showed that students who participated in school-sponsored activities demonstrated academic growth (Abruzzo et al., 2016; Bakoban & Aljarallah, 2015; Broh, 2002; Dawes et al., 2015.) Some studies also focused on how the psychological and social benefits provided the student-athlete a way to grow as an individual and as a teammate (Davidson, 2010; Eccles et al., 2003; Fredericks & Simpkins, 2012, Hughes et al., 2016). Other studies discussed how athletic participation puts pressure on individuals to be successful and causes others to engage in behavior that is risky and frowned upon (Davidson, 2010; Fredericks & Simpkins, 2013; Marsh et al., 2002). This study was created to examine how student-athletes who had been identified as low SES perceived their experiences in high school and whether their participation in athletics had motivated them to work harder in the classroom and on the field.

This study is different from previous studies in that it focused on the phenomenon that the participants were more successful academically while playing sports only to allow their

grades to drop upon the completion of the athletic season. The study investigated six individuals who experienced fluctuation in their academic performance, with each being more successful academically during the athletic season. To compare the results of my study to the literature presented in Chapter 2, I address each research question and discuss differences and similarities.

Question 1: What meaning, if any, did student-athletes from low SES backgrounds ascribe to the experience of athletic participation as it related to their academic

motivation? Through my analytical memos, I continued to be pulled back to the repetitive statements made by all participants regarding their relationships with their team and their role on the team. Using statements including the word “love” and Kenny who called his team a “band of brothers,” the overarching attitude was that if they failed in the classroom, they could not help their team on the field. Rarely did any of the participants discuss not graduating or continuing on their education; their responses focused primarily on being present on the field to help the team.

The feeling of family shared by all participants seemed to fill a void found at home. Being with their teammates all day at school and then for hours every night at practice allowed them to develop a closeness that they only shared with their teammates. Those individuals were often their friends when the season was over and the individuals who pushed them to try harder as the next season approached. Coming from a family with very little financial stability, life becomes a fight for attention and a desire to be something bigger than yourself. Athletics provided the participants with an opportunity to do just that. All of the participants described themselves as good athletes who had an important role on their team which was a strong contrast to their academic identity. Ultimately, the one requirement to ensure that they were given that chance was to make the grades needed to be eligible. If they did not work hard in the classroom, they would not get to help their teammates on the court.

The initial research question sought to determine whether the participants felt that their participation in athletics was related to the effort they exerted in the classroom during different times throughout the school year. My results showed that the participants put more effort in to their school work during the athletic season because if they did not make the grades, they would not be able to play sports. When they were not on the field, they felt they were letting others down; and all six participants stated they would do whatever it took to make sure they did not let their teammates down. My study also found that the participants identified themselves more positively as skilled athletes as compared to skilled students.

While Davidson (2010) found that athletic participation did not result in a significant increase in academic achievement, it should be noted that he looked at the overall academic performance of the student-athlete and did not break it down according to times they were participating in athletics and when they were out of season. Abruzzo et al. (2016) concluded in their study that participation in athletics led to a higher self-concept, better grades, and increased motivation. My study confirms that finding and delves into why the individual tends to be more motivated during the athletic season.

Additional studies supported the findings in this study showing that not only do the students benefit academically, but also they related it back to a better self-image and an increase in social capital. Im et al. (2016) described how participation in athletics resulted in a positive school identity and a positive identity when being a part of a school-sponsored activity. My study found that the participants felt that the younger players looked up to them; and therefore they had to perform well in the classroom to set an example for the others.

A study conducted by Fredericks and Eccles (2010) discussed how high expectations and participation in athletics positively correlated with academic success. Contrary to what I found,

they also felt that participation could lead to risky behaviors among the players. The participants in my study perceived themselves as leaders, and they felt they needed to set the example for others to follow. Three participants stated that the leadership role they took kept them from participating in that type of behavior.

Although there were many studies in my literature review, most confirmed that participation in athletics has a significant positive effect on student grades and the way they think about themselves. My study not only agreed with those findings, but furthermore examined why the six participants in my study felt they were more motivated during the athletic season and explained why their effort increased during that time.

Question 2: What role did athletic participation play in increasing the student-athletes academic motivation?

Although there were many factors that remained present throughout the entire school year, all of the participants felt that they were supported more during the athletic season compared to when the season concluded. This seemed to be the case for both athletics and academics, but much more so for the athletic support given to the student-athletes. Families attended games and crowds cheered them on through each play, successful or not. Unfortunately, the feeling of support quickly ended at the conclusion of the season, and the student-athletes felt they were part of a different culture that did not make them feel as though they were part of something special.

Another area that seemed to fade with the end of the season was the ability to participate with their athletic family on the court. All participants admitted that when they did not need the grades to play and their grades were not a focus of the team and coaches, their effort in the classroom drastically changed. Five of the six participants told stories of goofing off in class and

not doing their work on a consistent basis. Interestingly enough, they all discussed how their attitudes changed when working in groups. Their attitudes mirrored the feelings for their teammates stating that when they worked in groups, the others would count on them to do their work and they were not going to let them down.

Academic support was another aspect that all participants agreed was provided throughout the year in one way or another. Family, teachers, staff, teammates, and friends were available to help, and their help was sought frequently during the athletic season but was not elicited nearly as much once the season was over. Kenny reflected on whether he worked in class as hard by stating,

It depends on if I get to play or not. If I was eligible to still play I would try to fix the problem, but if I wasn't I would just sit back and not do anything and be all depressed and just not try.

He, along with the other participants, was aware of different ways to get help at school but admitted that he simply did not take advantage of them once the season was over.

The second question was developed to identify the support systems that were present during the athletic season. The experiences of the participants in my study showed that academic support was present in one form or another throughout the school year, but their use of these resources declined once the season concluded. Athletic support was usually more seasonal and often ended when the season ended.

Bjornson and Dinkel (2017) conducted a study that concluded that student-athletes tend to struggle academically without support. This study looked at the issue through the eyes of the coaches and found that coaches believed the student-athletes would benefit from mentoring programs and other programs that help student-athletes develop into leaders and prepare for life

beyond school. The results of my study partially agreed in that the participants looked up to older student-athletes and worked hard to be a part of the team. However, once they became leaders on the team, their influence on others pushed them to work harder to prevent letting their teammates, including the younger players, down.

Romo (2011) conducted a study of college athletes who were transitioning from high school athletics to college athletics and found the experiences of the athletes confirmed that academic struggles can be a result of adapting to all the aspects of athletic participation including adapting to a new culture. However, he stated that the student-athletes felt that being a part of a team had a positive effect on the students' ability to adjust to these changes and helped them adapt to the new academic requirements. Again, his study determined that being a part of a team benefited the students while they remained a part of that social group.

Throughout Chapter 2, I discussed research that highlighted many positive attributes of being a part of a team. Students benefit psychologically, have greater self-worth, and get a sense of being a part of a unit or team when they participate in athletics (Abruzzo et al., 2016; Dawes & Larson, 2011; Peck et al., 2008). Unfortunately, as four of the participants in my study confirmed, those feelings often concluded with the athletic season.

Question 3: What experiences changed at the conclusion of the athletic season that resulted in student-athletes performing at a lower level academically?

To get the best results for the study, I intentionally asked each participant why they felt they performed better academically while in sports compared to when they were not participating. Although the answers varied with each participant, they all stated pieces of information that they repeated as answers to similar questions later in the interview. Answers to

this question varied from feeling more supported by their family and the school to knowing when they needed to work harder or when they could “take their foot off the gas.”

Ultimately, the answers ended up reflecting on the common theme that I witnessed throughout all six interviews. All of the student athletes loved playing sports and knew that if they did not put the effort in to get the grades, they could not play sports. This was the one thing they could choose to do because they wanted to and not because they were forced to. Four of the six participants continued by reflecting on their roles on the team and discussed how others looked up to them when they were in athletics. Jeff stated, “If you love your team and your teammates, you will do all you can to stay on the team and help them out.”

All six participants made reference to team membership as something bigger than oneself required; putting in the extra effort in the classroom then, is a small price to pay. All participants missed that bond and wished they could just go back for one more game. Mike stated,

I think about this all the time. I would start working out a lot earlier. I could have been better both in school and on the court. There is so much more I know about basketball that I wish I would have known then. I would have tried harder in school and outside of school.

Studies have explored similar questions and tried to determine what factors lead student-athletes to perform better or worse academically. Mahoney and Vest (2012) felt that students who were so busy playing athletics might not have the time needed to be academically successful. Their study did not find a relationship between the two and showed that students still benefitted from athletic participation even when the time requirements reached twenty hours a week.

Fredericks and Eccles (2005) studied youth development and how it relates to a student's participation in athletics. They concluded that athletic participation leads to positive academic engagement and psychological development. This development would benefit the students as they grow and become productive members within the school setting. Abruzzo et al. (2016) supported their findings stating that athletic participation increases student motivation and leads to greater academic success.

As I stated earlier in Chapter 4, the participants in my study seemed to have greater academic motivation when their success in the classroom affected their ability to play and help their teammates. A study conducted by Schrack-Walters et al. (2008) examined the team and their experiences regarding the teammates being a part of a family. He concluded that when the players have that type of perspective, they put others before themselves and do not seek recognition for themselves, but instead seek to help the team succeed.

Ultimately, a majority of the studies I reviewed found many positive correlations between athletics and academic success. What my study sought to do was to examine individuals who showed a fluctuation of grades depending on when they were involved in athletics and when they were not and develop possible reasons why this phenomenon occurs based on the experiences of the six participants who experienced the phenomenon.

Summary

The experiences of all six participants described individuals who thrived on the athletic field, but struggled in the classroom. All stated that their efforts were greater during the athletic season due to the grade requirements needed to participate in sports. They continued stating that the younger players looked up to them and that if they did not make the grade to play, they would let the team and their teammates down. All participants repeatedly stated that it was never

about them but about the team that they loved. As graduates, they demonstrated the ability to be academically successful but also admitted that they often chose to slack off and not put the effort in that was needed to be successful in the classroom. Personal failure did not have the same effect on the participants. When their actions affected others, their motivation increased; and the six participants did what was necessary to be academically successful.

Throughout the interviews, participants related that the expectations put on them varied not only by who was placing the expectations on them but also the type of expectations. All felt that the expectations placed on their athletics came more from their family and their team, while the school, coaches, and teachers pushed them to be academically successful. Upon reflecting on their future and their current status, all of the participants wished that they had been pushed more by all involved when it came to academics. Athletics was an extremely important part of their lives, but they all felt that academics was what leads to a better future. Ultimately, the experiences of the participants in regards to their academic success revolved around how their actions in the classroom affected their ability to play sports and help their team. They perceived that their motivation was other-centered and focused on the success of the team and helping their teammates be successful.

The final theme that was evident was that the participants were supported in both athletics and academics. Athletic support was perceived to be more seasonal, but was represented on the field, in the classroom, and at the home. Success was measured on the field of play, and the participants felt that their actions had meaning in that venue. Academically, each participant felt that they had some type of support year-round. Whether that support was given by family, friends, coaches, teammates, or teachers, it was available. All stated that they took more advantage of this support during the athletic season due to the grade requirements and

to their knowledge that if they did not get the grades, they would let their team down. Despite grades being the sole aspect of school determining whether or not they graduated, the participants continually placed a higher level of importance on the need to be an example for their teammates and to help them be successful on the field.

Throughout my study, I attempted to find how the experiences of six participants could lead to changes in my approach to promoting activities that can benefit students academically, socially, and psychologically. As many of the studies I researched show, athletics benefits students in a multitude of ways. Researchers such as Abruzzo (2016), Broh (2002), Eccles (2003), and Fredericks (2012), and many others have found that the benefits far outweigh any negative attributes associated with athletic participation.

My findings echoed much of what they said but also allowed me to delve into the thinking of my participants and relate their experiences to what I had gone through in high school. What I found was that athletics gave these individuals the support and love that some of them were missing. They became a part of something that was greater than them and placed the needs of the team above their own. This forced them to increase their effort in the classroom and work harder to get the grades needed to be a part of the team and help their teammates on the field. Finding a way to ensure that that feeling remains beyond the athletic season is a challenge worth taking on for any administrator who witnesses student-athletes with the ability to be academically successful fall short because they cannot find the motivation to push them to the top of the mountain and succeed in the classroom.

Additionally, students who come from a background with limited funds and support can be academically successful, can find a way to belong despite having limited resources to help them along the way, and can help others who look up to them as leaders.

Practical Implications

There are four primary implications that resulted from this research study. The first is that the number of activities that an individual participates in is not as important as the value the student gets from being a part of the activity. When participating, it is important that the students feel they are part of something important and that they have a valuable role in what takes place. If and when they feel that their actions help determine the success of the team, individuals like those in my study will put more effort into whatever it takes to be successful.

The second implication that the coach or sponsor should promote is a family-like atmosphere when coordinating the activities. It is important that coaches strive to ensure that all students feel their opinions are important and work to promote the team's ability to build each other up and never accept failure due to lack of support or effort. Coaches should rotate leaders and allow each individual the opportunity to be a leader and set an example for the other participants. My study found that even though their actions could affect the athletes ability to play and even graduate, they strongest feeling revolved around the participants' actions negatively affecting their teammates. Creating that connection could serve as a motivating factor for more individuals to work harder in the classroom.

The third implication is to do whatever is necessary to offer a wide variety of activities at no cost to individuals who have different skill sets and abilities. Doing this will allow for more students to become active in school, discover new ways to relate to other students, and form identities that promote a sense of belonging. Schools should create ample opportunities for all students to develop relationships that will help them deal with all that our youth deal with on a daily basis. These opportunities may serve as an opportunity for the students to develop a

positive identity that might not exist otherwise. When they feel important, they will likely put more effort into doing what it takes to continue to participate in the activity.

Another area I feel could be addressed is the area of athletic eligibility. With my findings, I would recommend a discussion with officials that schools and the IHSAA revisit their eligibility requirements and policies in regards to high school athletics. I believe my findings support that requiring that despite the number of sports the individual plays, the student-athletes must maintain a certain standard throughout the school year to remain eligible to participate in sports. I understand that this is a difficult change that can keep some individuals from participating in the athletics programs that tend to increase motivation, but my findings show that if they are aware that grades will affect their ability to help their teammates and be a part of something bigger, they will put forth the effort needed to academically successful.

Finally, I recommend finding ways within the groups or teams to celebrate the success of the team above the success of individuals. According to the experiences of the six participants in my study, the needs and accomplishments of the team far outweigh their individual successes. In addition, it is important to celebrate individuals in the context of the team and develop the belief that their actions affect the team. Whether that is negatively or positively is up to them as a valuable member of the team.

Recommendations for Further Research

Throughout the interviews, data analysis, and writing of the conclusions, I felt there were additional areas that might be considered for future investigations. My study was very limited due to the specific types of participants I wanted in my study. I believe there are additional aspects that could help schools further their knowledge on what works best for their students, staff, and parents. Some of those studies are explained in the paragraphs that follow.

My study only included six participants who experienced the phenomenon. I limited my study to include only those students who had been identified as low SES. Including all students would give a wider variety of individuals and allow me to study the experiences of more individuals who come from different backgrounds. Much of the research on this topic has been quantitative or mixed methods and has failed to get the perceptions of the students who either benefit from these types of activities or who do not demonstrate similar behavior when participating in school activities. Past studies such as those completed by Davidson (2010), Eccles (2004), Fredericks (2005), and Im (2016) use surveys to get an understanding of what the participants feel. However, other qualitative methods could be used to get to the base knowledge found when interviewing individuals and obtaining more in depth answers through questions that get to the root of understanding the perspectives of the individuals who experience what is being studied.

Another area that would be beneficial is getting the perceptions of the coaches, teachers, and families of the individuals who show fluctuations in academic performance based on participation in athletics. Schrack-Walters et al., (2008) demonstrated the effectiveness of the interview other people who influence the participants in their study. Getting their perceptions and comparing those to the experiences of the student-athletes could give the researcher a new perspective on what can be done by all involved to promote academic growth in students throughout the school year.

My study gave me a new respect for qualitative research. Throughout my learning curve, I discovered that when done rigorously, qualitative research allows the researcher to go beyond the numbers and find deeper meaning through the experiences of those who can actually tell you why they feel they reacted one way or another. Learning that our schools still have students who

love deeply, despite their circumstances and put others before themselves, gives me a renewed faith in our children and a desire to promote this in all of the students in my school.

Conclusion

The purpose of my study was to examine student-athletes identified as low SES who experienced the phenomenon of performing better academically while participating in athletics only to allow their grades to fall once the season was finished. The results showed that despite the possibility of not graduating or experiencing other consequences related to poor academic performance, the primary reason the participants were more successful during the athletic season was because if they did not make the grades, they could not play. I focused on that and found that all six participants wanted to participate because if they did not, the team would not be as successful and they would let their teammates down. All participants demonstrated a true connection with their teams and placed the needs of the team above their own.

Although the results of this study are not to be generalized and may not be able to be replicated, the results should be enough to make administrators, teachers, sponsors, and coaches reflect on what their focus is when working with these individuals. Knowing that these six student-athletes valued their roles as leaders and found something greater out of playing a sport gives me hope that we can reach the unreachable. It takes finding that activity or club that can motivate individuals to leave their comfort zone and take a chance at making a difference for others. In the end, all students can succeed; and finding ways to allow them to demonstrate their true abilities should be the focus of every person who is involved in their lives.

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Appendix A

Recruitment Message

(The discussion will be completed on phone if possible. If not, it will be sent in the mail.)

Hello ,

My name is Mike McCoy and I am a Doctoral student from Ball State University. I was given you name by [REDACTED], the principal at [REDACTED] High School. She, along with a committee of coaches, counselors, and administrators helped me come up with some possible candidates for a study that I am conducting and I was wondering if you would be willing to discuss the chance that you might be a participant in the study.

To give you some background on my study, it is titled: A Phenomenological Study of the Relationship Between Athletic Participation and Academic Motivation with High School Student-Athletes from Low SES Backgrounds. What that means for you as it relates to this study is that during your time as a student-athlete, you demonstrated some specific criteria that would be beneficial to my study. Not all students are alike and this study works to find things in the school setting that you felt helped you gain the motivation needed to be successful in school. The criteria I am looking at examine your success in the classroom while you were in sports and compare it to the success you had after the season was over. With your help, I can dig deeper into the possible benefits, if any, associated with athletic participation and determine how these can be used to help more students throughout their whole educational career.

As a participant, you will be asked to participate in three ways. The first will be an extended interview, taking approximately an hour, in which the investigator will ask the questions on the attached sample question form. All interviews will take place at the High School unless special arrangements need to be made to accommodate you. The second interview will be shorter and take place once the researcher has interviewed all participants in the study. This meeting will be used to clarify any answers or extend the question to include your perception of an individual, process, or event. This interview should be no longer than 30 minutes. The final meeting will be a process called "member checking" where the researcher will present their findings and check to see if you agree with the investigators interpretation of the information given during the interviews. This will involve some reading and discussion and the length will vary depending on the findings.

With your permission, I will send you a copy of the consent form that goes into more specifics and ask for possible times to set up the first interview. Remember, the first interview will take longer because there is more information to cover.

I appreciate your time and consideration in this matter. As an educator, my hope is and will always be, reaching as many students as I can and helping them find success in whatever they choose to do. Your participation will help me and other school leaders develop programs that will help students to reach their goals.

Appendix B**ADULT CONSENT FORM FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH**

(Individuals must be 18 or older to sign)

Study Title: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ATHLETIC PARTICIPATION AND ACADEMIC MOTIVATION WITH HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETES FROM LOW SES BACKGROUNDS

Study Purpose and Rationale

The purpose of the research is to determine what, if any, relationships, procedures, or other areas related to school sponsored athletics, you, the participant, perceive led to academic motivation and success in the classroom while you were in athletics which was no longer effective upon the completion of the athletic season.

The rational focuses on students from low SES backgrounds who are often looked upon as a reason test scores are low for many schools and corporations. Although there are many avenues to help these individuals, many are often left to fall through the education cracks and struggle throughout their academic career. Athletics has been proven in many studies to help students find success in the classroom and finish their academic career with a diploma. However, some athletes show a higher level of academic success while in athletics only to drop below that standard once the season concludes. My study will look at what aspects of athletic participation do you perceive was beneficial to you during the season, but no longer helped when the season was over. This information can be used to educate school administrators on what can be offered to help motivate other students who either do not participate in athletics or do so only part of the school year.

Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

You must have participated in the free and reduced lunch program during high school. Also, you must have participated in school sponsored athletics, and must have demonstrated a drop in grades following the completion of your athletic season. You must be 18 years old or older and have either graduated from high school or no longer be enrolled. Students who participate in athletics for every season of the year will not be included.

Participation Procedures and Duration

You will be asked to participate in three ways. The first will be an extended interview, taking approximately an hour, in which the investigator will ask the questions on the attached sample question form. All interviews will take place at the Franklin County High School unless special arrangements need to be made to accommodate you. The second interview will be shorter and take place once the researcher has interviewed all participants in the study. This meeting will be used to clarify any answers or extend the question to include your perception of an individual, process, or event. This interview should be no longer than 30 minutes. The final meeting will be a process called "member checking" where the researcher will present their findings and check to see if you agree with the investigators interpretation of the information given during the interviews. This will involve some reading and discussion and the length will vary depending on the findings.

Audio or Video Tapes

During the interviews, the investigator will use a digital recorder to ensure he has all the information as presented during the interviews. The recording will be kept throughout the study and for a period of three years after the study has been completed. At all times, the information will be stored in a locked cabinet and will be accessible only to the investigator.

Data Confidentiality or Anonymity

All data will be maintained as confidential and no information that can be used to identify you will be available to anyone other than the investigator. Information discussed in the study will have no identifying information linked to the results.

Storage of Data and Data Retention Period

Throughout the process, I will use a laptop designated for the study. The device will require passwords to get on to the computer and into each file that has data. The data will be assigned to a different identification number created by myself for the purpose of the study. The recorded interviews will be stored on a device purchased solely for the study and locked in a drawer when not being used. During the interviews, the alternate ID will be used to identify the participant by me. I will be the only individual with access to the desk drawer throughout the study. Upon completion of the study and publishing of the dissertation, the memory will be erased after three years.

Voluntary Participation

“Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you are free to withdraw your permission at anytime for any reason without penalty or prejudice from the investigator. Please feel free to ask any questions of the investigator before signing this form and at any time during the study.”

IRB Contact Information

For one’s rights as a research subject, you may contact the following: For questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact the Director, Office of Research Integrity, Ball State University, Muncie, IN 47306, (765) 285-5070 or at irb@bsu.edu.

Study Title A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ATHLETIC PARTICIPATION AND ACADEMIC MOTIVATION WITH HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETES FROM LOW SES BACKGROUNDS

Consent

I, _____, agree to participate in this research project entitled, A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ATHLETIC PARTICIPATION AND ACADEMIC MOTIVATION WITH HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETES FROM LOW SES BACKGROUNDS. I have had the study explained to me and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have read the description of this project and give my consent to participate. I understand that I will receive a copy of this informed consent form to keep for future reference.

To the best of my knowledge, I meet the inclusion/exclusion criteria for participation (described on the previous page) in this study.

Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher Contact Information

Principal Investigator:

Faculty Supervisor:

Mikel L. McCoy, Graduate Student

Dr. Kendra Lowery

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Educational Leadership

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Appendix C

Interview Questions:

Introductory:

1. Tell me a little bit about your experiences at CHS, both in the classroom and on the athletic field/court.
 - a. Listen for information specific to athletics, academics.
 - i. Explain your experience as a student taking classes CHS?
 1. What were your most challenging courses and why were they so difficult?
 2. Which classes were your favorites and what did you learn from those classes?
 3. Discuss some of your most significant learning experiences, both positive and negative, while in school at CHS. Explain how these experiences made you want to give up or try harder.
 - ii. Describe your experiences as an athlete at CHS?
 1. What sport(s) did you play?
 2. Describe the parts about being on the team you enjoyed the most and some things you did not like.
 3. Discuss some of the things you did while on the team that defined who you were as a teammate? Explain how these roles benefitted you and the team.
 4. Discuss how you have taken these situations and used them when you were not playing sports?
 - b. Why do you feel you did better academically when you were in athletics compared to when the season was over?

Additional Questions:

1. As you reflect on your time at CHS, who or what do you feel were some of the greatest motivators that pushed you to perform better as a student?
 - i. What role did your family play in your education?
 1. What were some things that your family did to support you with your academics?
 2. What were the rules in your house in regards to your grades?
 3. Discuss some times that you did well in the classroom which resulted in praise from your family? Did that make you want to continue to do well?
 4. Tell me about things that would happen if you were not making good grades? Did that motivate you to do better in class?

ii. What role did friends play in your education?

1. Discuss your friends and their attitudes towards school and their grades.
2. What were some ways they motivated you to work harder in class?
3. Describe some instances when they wanted you to do some things that would have made it harder to get your classwork done.

iii. What role did the team play in your education?

1. Describe some times when the coach talked about the team's performance in the classroom? What were some things the coach did to make sure you were working hard in all of your classes.
2. Explain how your teammates pushed you to keep your grades up?
3. Discuss some ways the coaches made sure the whole team stayed focused on getting the grades you need to stay eligible?

iv. What role did the school play in your education?

1. Describe some conversations you had with teachers about your grades and passing their classes?
2. Discuss any meetings or conversations the teachers had with your parents about your performance in their classes? (This could be in person or other).
3. What were some programs the school offered to help you with your classes? Explain why you did or did not take advantage of them.

2. As you continue to think back to the time you spent in high school, who or what were some of the greatest motivators that pushed you to perform better as an athlete?

i. What role did your family play in your athletic career?

1. In what ways, if any, did your family support you as an athlete?
2. Give some examples of how your family members talked to you about your performance on the court/field?
3. Describe some times that you and a family member practiced your sport together?

ii. What role did friends play in your athletics?

1. How did your close circle of friends change from season to season.
2. Compare and contrast your closest friends during the season and then after the season was over.
3. What things did you do when/if you were together after practice?

iii. What role did the team play in athletics?

1. Give me some details about times the coaches talked to you about your role on the team.
 2. In what ways, if any, did your coaches display behavior that made them positive role models for you and your teammates?
 3. Describe your feelings when you made a great play? Compare that to the feeling you had when your team did something that was beyond what people expected.
- iv. What role did the school play in your athletic career?
1. Describe the school's atmosphere on game days or during homecoming week,
 2. Discuss any instances when teachers or classmates treated you differently because you were an athlete.
 2. Discuss any times that the athletic director or a school administrator met with you about your eligibility as an athlete.
3. Looking back at high school, think about each time you finished an athletic season.
- i. What were some of the changes you noticed with your interactions with different people?
 1. In what ways, if any, did your relationships with teachers, coaches, family or friends change when the season was over?
 2. Discuss ways that your interactions with other individuals not associated with the athletic team, changed when the season was over.
4. When looking back at your experience as a student what might have helped you to be more successful?
- i. What would have helped you in the classroom?
 1. Describe other things that you feel would have helped you outside of the classroom.
 2. Discuss ways that you felt more or less support during the athletic season compared to when the season was over.
5. How do you feel the changes in academic success during high school have affected your life to this point?
- i. In what ways, if any, do you use the lessons and skills you learned in athletics in your current life?
 - ii. In what ways, if any, do you use the lessons and skills you learned in the classroom in your current life?

6. If you could go back in time to and give advice to yourself as an incoming freshman who participates in athletics, what would you say?

Appendix D*Identified Subthemes, with identified categories matched with In Vivo codes.*

Categories, Themes, and Subthemes	In Vivo Codes
Athletic Identity (Effort, Self, Team, Others)	<p>I loved playing every sport.</p> <p>We are just one big family.</p> <p>Band of brothers.</p> <p>I joined because I wanted to.</p> <p>I was the only one to go on and play college soccer.</p> <p>I had a really big role on the team and they really depended on me.</p> <p>I was helping to guide them in the right direction.</p>
Academic Identity (Effort, Self, Team, Others)	<p>I wasn't very smart.</p> <p>I didn't know a lot.</p> <p>I was just really bad in English.</p> <p>My friends would help me through it.</p> <p>Just goes in one ear and out the other.</p> <p>I was just lazy.</p> <p>I took my foot off the gas when I knew my grades were good.</p> <p>I was never really good in school.</p>
Athletic Support (Coach, Team, Family, School, Friends)	<p>He (coach) just brought everyone together.</p> <p>They are always there for you and you are always there for them.</p> <p>Not just my immediate family, but my extended family.</p>

Academic Support (Coach, Team, Family,
School, Friends)

He (coach) would stay after school to help.

My family didn't care as much when the
season was over.

In season they are your best friends, but out of
season you won't hear from them at all.

My parents were always very busy.

My parents were happy as long as I was
playing sports.

Most of the teachers would help you.

My coach would help, even not during the
season.

There was always a teacher available during
student resource time.

They (school) would do everything they
could.

Those teachers didn't push you as hard in the
classroom.

They wouldn't care as much.

He (teacher) kept us engaged the whole time.

I had a girlfriend who was my tutor.

No contact whatsoever with my parents.

Athletic Expectations (Self, Other)

You can't give up.

Working as a team. Nothing else mattered.

To be as good as I can be and not fail my
teammates and coaches.

They wanted to play college basketball.

I enjoyed playing with my friends and being
successful with them.

Academic Expectations (Self, Other)

They looked up to me.

I would goof off in class.

I didn't think I was going to graduate.

You have to keep your grades up to play.

Academics comes before athletics.

There were really no rules.

They saw that one of their captains was doing something they should not be doing.

Take class more seriously.
